

BLUE BOOK

MAGAZINE for NOVEMBER ★ 25 CENTS

30¢ IN CANADA



Army Mule

A Complete Book-Length Novel
by FAIRFAX DOWNEY

Should the Olympic
Games Be Continued?

Music's Got Charms
by NELSON BOND

Rugged Crowd
by JOEL REEVE

We Came to the Village
by PAUL HUGHES

Who's Who *in this Issue*

Fairfax Downey

FAIRFAX DOWNEY comes from an old Army family—was born in Salt Lake City in 1893, the son of Brigadier General George Downey, who was himself the son of an Army officer. Fairfax Downey graduated from Yale in 1916 and went into newspaper work, first on the Kansas City *Star* and then on the New York *Herald Tribune* and New York *Sun*. He won his commission as a Captain in the Field Artillery in 1918, and received a Silver Star citation for his part in the Belleau Wood action. He has been back in the service in this war as a Major in the AUS since 1942, but has recently returned from overseas duty and is now back on the job as a writing-man. "Army Mule," a novel of General Crooks' famous campaign against the Apaches begins on page 106. Among his other books are "Young Enough to Know Better," "The Grande Turke," "Portrait of an Era," "Disaster Fighters" and "Indian Fighting Army."



Major Downey



Lawrence Watkin

Lawrence Watkin

YOU see him here in his uniform as an author, but since 1942 he has been in service as a Lieutenant Commander in the Navy. He taught at Washington & Lee University for a number of years. His first novel "On Borrowed Times" was very successfully dramatized by Paul Osborn and was later filmed. "Geese in the Forum" appeared in 1940. His last novel was called "The Gentleman from England" and he has also written and published several children's books. Oh, yes! He was born in Camden, N. Y., in 1911, was graduated from Harvard in 1925, is married and the father of three children.

S/Sgt. Stanley Zuckerberg

HE is twenty-six years old, a native of Long Beach, L. I. A scholarship from the local high school, enabled him to enter Pratt Institute, Brooklyn, N. Y., and started him on his career as an artist.

Blue Book gave him his first professional job as an illustrator, but before the war he did illustrating for a number of other magazines.

As Photo-Interpreter for the 462nd Bomb Group, of the 58th Wing of the 20th Air Force, he has journeyed over most of Asia.

He has drawn the target charts for bombings of the Japanese homeland by the B-29's; and the insignia which he designed is used on all B-29's of the 462nd Bomb Group.

He also was among those to fly over Tokyo Bay on the day of the signing of the surrender papers.

While in India, he illustrated a four-page spread for *Cosmopolitan Magazine*, titled "Rush Order"—authored by Col. Kalberer, the Group Commander.



Readers' Comment*

Take Contents Type Off Cover?

THE month by month quality of the cover piece of BLUE BOOK would make an excellent piece of "den" art if you were able to exclude the bothersome declaration of stories contained within, and have the title free from the face of the drawing.

I consider myself to be an average reader of your magazine, and I never read the name of stories printed on the cover—nor is my purchase of the issue determined by the authors' names.

Furthermore, the suggestion that the cover piece be used to improve the flavor of a wall seems to me an excellent way to improve circulation too. But then I'm prejudiced.

George Baldwin.

Forever Young

THE short one-page story "Forever Young," by Richard Hubler, in the June issue of BLUE BOOK came at a very appropriate time for me. We received a similar telegram four weeks earlier, and our sorrow in the loss of our only son is eased by the message contained in Mr. Hubler's story.

No doubt many parents feel as I do about this, and it is with this thought in mind that this letter is written in sincere appreciation.

K. E. L.

A High Percentage

IT is five months since I read my first copy of BLUE BOOK Magazine. The percentage of real, downright interesting and entertaining material I found in that issue surprised me. Thinking I might have run across an exceptionally well-rounded issue, I refused to let my hopes grow too high. But every issue since has consistently maintained that excellent standard.

Of the eleven short stories in the August issue, I found but two that failed to hold my interest. The two short novels "The Hill of Yuan" and "The Plastic Dagger" were outstanding. Six of the ten Special Features were right down my alley. That sums up to an average far surpassing the contents of any other magazine that I have yet come across.

Thomas C. Higgins.

*The Editors of BLUE BOOK are glad to receive letters of constructive criticism and suggestions; and for the ones we publish each month we will pay the writers ten dollars each.

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BLUE BOOK

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The Sorcerer's Daughter

A strange treasure quest made possible by a wartime invention that failed as a mine-detector but would locate objects buried deeper.

by H. BEDFORD-JONES

MURCHISON and I left Genoa with the Baby, as we decided to call it, in our rattling old Fiat. Our pal the Vicomte de Gondy had gone ahead to line up the project and obtain quarters in Alassio, on what used to be Mussolini's Italian Riviera. Now French troops were in possession, and although the war was well over, tourists had not yet begun to clutter up the landscape.

As yet we knew little about our quest for the Dolls' House and the sorcerer's daughter; Gondy would attend to all that. We had been busy with the Baby.

Murchison and I had served during the war in radionic laboratories, devising mine detectors that would offset the infernal Kraut ingenuity. Once discharged, we roped in Gondy as our contact man and set forth to make our fortune. Gondy was impulsive, charming, handsome and reliable. Murchison was skinny, often grouchy and apt to be flighty, but a fine technician. With me, Bill Carson, to act as brains and ballast, we got on beautifully.

The Baby resulted from one of our laboratory failures. It started out as an electronic detector of mines, which it decidedly was not; it was like hunting quail with a Boston bull. So, with our usual Yankee ingenuity, we turned it to detecting other things, and by electronics out of radar, so to speak, we got something good. We had tubes of our own devising, and into the Baby put our best brains, vastly improving it over our original detector. We were, in brief, after buried treasure—and we had proved that we could get it.

Now, aside from legends, people do not stand on street-corners and holler that they have buried treasure in their back yards. Locating such deposits takes finesse. Gondy had this, and he knew everyone worth knowing on the Continent, spoke half a dozen languages, and was a good scout. He had turned up our present job, about which as yet we knew little.

"Well, the Baby works, that's sure. Never saw anything sweeter," said Murchison, as I piloted the old Fiat along the endless series of railroad tunnels and crossings that marked the Riviera road north of Genoa. "She really works, Carson! And they say this Alassio place is the biggest resort on the coast, outside of San Remo, filled with English tourists before the war. Looks like a cushy little job for us and our magnesium Baby."

"We were lucky to get our hands on that magnesium," I replied. "But don't expect any cushy job extracting gold from Mother Europe, Murch. Especially from Italians. We take our lives in our hands when we try it."

"Tell me something new," he grunted. "Hil There's Alassio, I bet."

SO it was—a glaring, Fascist-perfect resort of boulevards and modernistic houses crowded inside Cape Santa Croce. This entire coast, where the Alps ran down to the sea and left a thin strip of beach between narrow valleys, had been improved out of recognition by Mussolini's regime, but we could glimpse a glorious five-mile stretch of open *plage* beyond that ran to the next little town, the hills rich with grayish olive groves and pricked out with vineyards.





We rolled into the town and found the Grand Allassio where Gondy was to meet us. And there he was, sipping a drink on the terrace, springing up eagerly when he caught sight of us and darting out to the curb.

"Hurray!" he exclaimed, pumping our hands. "All well? Hi! Don't get out here. We aren't staying."

"What?" We stared at him. "Not staying?"

He waved his hand at the *plage*. "No. We'll go right on to the next town, Laigueglia. They don't like Beppo here. I'll get my bag and Beppo, and be right out. Besides, Laigueglia is closer to our objective—a road goes right up from there. . . . Back in a minute!"

He popped off into the hotel, and reappeared with a porter, who carried his bag and something covered with a cloth.

"Beppo! What the devil is Beppo?" exclaimed Murchison. Then we saw that the covered object was a cage, and a voice came from it.

"Beppo, damn your eyes! *Schweinhund! Je m'en foutre—zut, alors! Corpo di Bacco*, give me a drink!"

EVEN the porter winced, as the cage erupted a torrent of the most scandalous German, French and English ever heard on the open street. Some passing French soldiers grinned and added a few choice expressions. Gondy climbed in and took the cage.

"Beppo is a parrot," he said unnecessarily. "And it belongs to the sorcerer's daughter, *mes amis*, so control yourselves. The thing was sick, and I brought it to town and got it doctored. It has no shame. Beppo! Be quiet!"

"Go to hell, you bastard!" said the voice, followed by a scream of rage.

"For God's sake, get going," pleaded Gondy, as a crowd began to form. I threw in the gears and we got away. Gondy was sweating, and Murchison cackling delightedly. "I've got a place engaged at Laigueglia, a cottage of our own, and a couple to take care of it. They won't mind the cussing—but no hotel would take us in."

He jerked the cover off the cage, and there was Beppo cocking a wary eye at us. He was the most devilish and beautiful thing I ever saw—a solid, bright, iridescent green except for vivid scarlet markings about his eyes and crest.

"He's fifty years old, from Brazil, and has spent all his fifty years learning filthy language," said Gondy. "And yet, my friends, he is also a saintly bird, actually! He knows a lot of Scripture and beautiful poetry and noble sentiments—and around Marina he never utters a bad word."

"Who, if one may ask, is Marina?" demanded Murchison!

"The sorcerer's daughter," said Gondy. "Since her father died, she has reeducated this beast of the devil."

"Marina! Marina!" squawked out Beppo. "Gentle Marina loves poor Beppo! Marina is an angel, you damned fools!"

A diabolic ingenuity was in the bird. No wonder Italians crossed themselves at the sight of him—and did it again in a hurry when he talked. Murchison was tickled pink, and I did not mind a bit, but poor Gondy had suffered and now he was fed up.

We covered the five miles of open road along the wide *plage*, and Laigueglia opened before us—another crowded little town at the base of the steep hillside, with a white stucco church, narrow streets, and houses mostly in glaring bright colors. Gondy guided us and we came to rest before a pink house under high trees, where an old couple appeared, to welcome us and make us at home.

This, said Gondy, was it. So it was: A pleasant house with a shady patio, and well stocked with everything; we liked it. For the next half-hour we unloaded and got unpacked, then settled down in the patio around a drink before luncheon. Explanations were needed, and Gondy gave them.

Donna Marina Borno was the sorcerer's daughter, so-called. She lived in the valley up above, at Andora, or where Andora used to be. Plague and wars and earthquakes had gradually laid Andora waste; and in the great earthquake of 1887 that destroyed so much of this coast, Andora had finally perished.

"That earthquake is important," Gondy said. "That is why we're here. The Borno family owned much of the valley; the old chap must have been quite a boy. He was a chemist and had a laboratory—hence the local name of sorcerer. Donna Marina is, I fancy, about thirty-five, and gifted in her own way. She has some country cousins who have made life hell for her and still do. They live in the hills somewhere nearby, fought in the Partisans against the Nazis, and are a tough lot. Beppo is one protection against them—a sort of watchdog. Last time they came to raid her house, she peppered them with a shotgun and has not been troubled since. Oh, Marina is strictly all right, I assure you!"

"In spite of Beppo?" I asked. Gondy nodded, his high-boned features and bright eyes all excited. I could see that he liked Donna Marina.

Murchison struck in quickly:

"Well, what about treasure? That's what brought me here, my good vicomte."

"Gold!" screamed Beppo. "Gold! *Que le grand diable l'emporte!* On your knees and pray, my friends. On

your knees! Gold will steal your souls."

"Shut up," snapped Gondy testily. "That brings us back to the 1887 earthquake, Murchison. A land boom was on; the government was building the railroad and tunnels that pierce the hill-shoulders above the shore. Borno—the grandfather of Marina—had a bank in Andora, a sort of country bank. A big shipment of government gold was sent up from Rome, to pay the contractors and workmen and soldiers; it was in Borno's bank, when the earthquake happened. The destruction was terrific."

He paused to finish his drink, and proceeded:

"All communications were cut off. Bandits came down from the hills. Borno took the gold home, took everything he had in the ruined bank with it, and buried it. Two of his servants did the work. All they could say, afterward, was that the gold was buried ten feet from a eucalyptus tree—they did it by night. Practically every tree in that place has been dug around a dozen times; no soap. Borno, I should explain, had a stroke the next day and never spoke again; he died without having revealed the secret. His son, the sorcerer, never found the treasure. The Marchese Grimani, at Genoa, gave me letters to Donna Marina, and consequently she's been most agreeable. We may search when we please; half of what is found, belongs to us."

BUT why have our headquarters here in Laigueglia, we asked—and a dozen more queries.

Gondy sketched a map on the table for us, patiently. Some miles along the shore, around Cape Mele, was the present railroad station and resort of Andora-on-the-Sea. The original Andora lay up the valley of the Merula River; the valley angled sharply back, so that to the old site from this place, Laigueglia, was only two or three miles—right over the hill, by mule-back or shank's mare.

"She has no place there for us," he went on. "Grandfather Borno, the banker, had his stroke because his grand house went to pieces after the earthquake. Now Marina lives in a small wooden house built on the grounds. You can see better than I can tell; mules will be here in the morning for us. It's a stiff climb, but we can come back afoot. And Carson needs exercise. He looks fat and puffy."

"The hell with you!" I said. "What about this Dolls' House thing?"

"That is where Donna Marina lives," Gondy said. "Wait. You'll understand when we get there, Bill. Now tell me about the detector—"

We prattled about the Baby, Beppo cursed and prayed, and then our de-

laid luncheon was ready, and we decided to spend the afternoon on the *plage*.

The whole thing looked rather hopeless to me. Mules! Country cousins and a feud! A woman running the place—I should have told Gondy never to have business dealings with a woman. I did not like the looks of the setup at all, but refrained from saying so. Murch felt about the same way, I could tell that. Further, Gondy's manner hinted at surprises ahead, and I do not like surprises.

Next morning, early, half a dozen mules and muleteers appeared. We loaded aboard the *Baby*, which had more bulk than weight due to its magnesium construction. Gondy was condemned to carry Beppo, naturally, and he shrieked curses at us in three tongues as we got off.

So began this day of surprises, of which our road or track was the first. It was steep, and in part was paved with rough cobbles, but huge olives shaded it and very beautiful we found it, as we mounted above the blue Mediterranean.

It was a pleasant climb—a short two miles, till we came out above the valley of the Merula, a gentle descent ahead and an outspread view which started Gondy bubbling, in his eager way, to explain.

Unaware of Beppo, I got a bad start on hearing from the tree above me part of the Gospel of St. John in a priestly voice. . . . The bird could imitate anyone.

From the stony valley rose an isolated hill crowned with ruins—the former town of Andora, with its castle, now consisting of two or three cottages, heaps of rubble, and a restored little church attached to the castle débris. The river, down below, was a stony expanse broken by a bare trickle of water and a few pools, and crossed by a magnificent ancient stone bridge. A Roman work, said Gondy; the *Via Aurelia*, now forgotten, ran here.

Everything, from the stones and gravel running toward the sea, to the lifting hills in the background, was desolate and empty of life. Not a peasant wagon, not a living creature, broke the dead landscape, but patches

of color appeared—the dusty green of olives by the bridge, the vivid white and scarlet of oleanders along the river pools, and on beyond, Gondy pointed to a clump of eucalyptus trees adjoining the olives.



"There's the Borno house—now it is the Dolls' House. Let's get going."

We got into motion again, Beppo squawking indignantly and profanely.

The group of eucalyptus trees towered over us as we drew near; they were old, huge, massive trees, their berries dropping over everything—but they grew inside the wall. An old wall, likewise massive, a wall ten feet high and cruelly topped with broken glass. Walls in Italy mean you come in at the gate or stay out.

The gate, too, was huge and massive, made of openwork iron an inch thick. Through it appeared eucalypti, the ruins of a stone house surrounded by other trees and an unused entrance drive. Beside the gate hung a bell-pull, which Gondy jerked hard. In answer, a man appeared hobbling along the drive—a gray-headed man, holding an enormous key which he waved at us.

He came to the gate, looked us over, exchanged greetings with the muleteers, then uttered an exclamation at sight of Gondy, whom he recognized.

"Yes, Donna Marina said to bring you, if it was you," he said, and swung the gate open. "You know the way, signore." Bright little old eyes in his weathered face glittered at us as we entered. Gondy paid the muleteers, saying we would walk back to Lai-gueglia and they might go, after unpacking the loads. Beppo must have recognized the sights and sounds, for he set up a delighted screeching that must have carried a mile.

Within the walls was a large space of ground, most of the huge eucalypti being at the back. We passed the tumbled ruins of the stone building, and sighted, ahead, a cottage of stained but unpainted wood. I noticed nothing unusual until I saw the muleteers staring and crossing themselves; then, upon closer view, the oddity appeared.

That little house was covered, up to a certain height, with tiny figures like dolls or puppets; but they were carved from the wood itself, not merely slapped on. Not only were they exquisitely carved, but each one was an individual. Apparently they were portraits. Some were grotesque, many were really beautiful; but all were filled with an impish gayety, like elfin laughter, and I found that closer inspection heightened this quality.

"I'd better warn you that Donna Marina speaks English," Gondy said in a low voice.

Why warn us? There was no chance to question him, however; we halted, our packed-up Baby was disembarked, the muleteers and mules departed, and Gondy, with Beppo's cage in hand, went to the door. There were no steps; the house was on ground

level. We saw why, as the door swung open and Donna Marina appeared to greet us.

"Good morning, gentlemen!" she said brightly, even gayly. "You are welcome, more welcome than I can tell you. And Beppo too! M. de Gondy, you have my warmest thanks—"

Beppo cawed and screeched in wild delight; Gondy bent over her hand, Murchison and I looked every which way and inwardly cursed him for not telling us, as we were introduced. Donna Marina was only a face, a torso garbed in a gay silk blouse, with long arms and strong, muscular hands attached. The rest of her was hidden under a shawl; she was in a wheelchair.

The vivid strength of her grip astonished me, my handshake astonished her and made her laugh; we made no pretence of imitating Gondy and kissing her fingers. I liked her laugh, and I liked her.

She had rich silky hair of dark brown. She wore dangling gold earrings. Her hazel eyes had the challenging look of one who meets the world chin up; her features were aquiline and perfect, yet she was not beautiful but rather, like the carved puppets on the walls, betrayed an impish, gleeful wisdom, as though she knew all secret things. The character in this face, its sheer force of personality, was something remarkable. She took instant charge of the situation, her bright, alert eyes studying each of us.

"Well, gentlemen, don't look embarrassed," she said, not mockingly but cheerily. "You behold a creature who has not walked since a horse threw her, twenty years ago; the sorcerer's daughter, my neighbors call me. This is the Dolls' House, as they call my handiwork, my sole amusement and occupation. They believe these carved figures are possessed of Satan, and no doubt extend the compliment to me also. But I assure you that within these walls is no satanic power, but quiet peace. This is my home, where you are also at home. Shall we go into the garden? Yes, M. le Vicomte, you may guide my chair, although I am quite capable of doing it myself, but it is pleasant to be attended like a lady."

We left our stuff lying. Gondy took her chair and manipulated it; though, as a rule, her fierce independence refused any such help, she liked his perfect courtesy. As we passed along the house, she pointed out certain figures and told who they were; as I had thought, they were portraits. Some of them pictured the Borno country cousins up in the hills, and these were brutal, savage fellows. Like the originals, she said; Alessandro and

Timoteo Borno were brigands even now.

The gardens had once been beautiful—a small, formerly sunken garden adjoining the little house, dotted with antique statuary, was now sadly dilapidated. Beyond lay a less formal expanse within the high walls. Gigantic eucalypti and high cypresses waved and dapple-shadowed the ground so that little grass grew, and here she halted us.

"Now let us speak of treasure, gentlemen," said she. "It is here, somewhere; enough gold to put us all on our feet, including me! I have no hope that you will find it; that old grandfather of mine was a clever fellow. But it is here, within these walls. Often men have dug for it. Once my pleasant cousins came, locked me in the house, and worked for three days turning up the ground; in vain. The last time they came, I used a shotgun—they were looting my house, breaking my carved figures. I peppered them well, and they ran."

WE talked for a time. She had no idea where the gold was hidden, except that it was ten feet from one of the big trees. This meant little; a dozen of those trees were scattered about. At one corner was a pool of water twenty feet across; it came from a spring, she said, and seeped away under the wall. The water was shallow but it was always fresh and clear.

Murchison and Gondy went to get the Baby, and left me alone with Donna Marina. I asked permission to light my pipe, and she laughed.

"Do, Mr. Carson, do! My, but you're a big, strong man! I used to be tall like you."

I obeyed.

"I think you're taller than I am now, Donna Marina," I told her. "There's a genius in those carved figures of yours that I'll never attain, in my own work. You have a great gift; it would be recognized, in America."

Her sharp eyes met mine, and softened. She smiled.

"That's kind of you. America! I have a greater reason for wanting to go there. Some of your soldiers were here during the war. One was a surgeon. He said that if I went to surgeons in America, I might be cured and might walk again. That's why I hope you can find the gold."

"Then perhaps we shall find it," I said. "There could be no better reason. You hope against hope, is that it?"

She nodded, and glanced at her hands.

"I hope, without belief; that expresses it. These hands are strong, they keep busy, they can do things, Mr. Carson. A gift? Yes; in compen-



Damming out the water, we got the hole dug. We dumped in the box, neat as a pin.

sation for what I have lost, perhaps. I am grateful that I have no bitterness or anger."

"No. You've had an outlet, in the work you found to do."

Her eyes flashed suddenly. "But I warn you! Alessandro and Timoteo, the cousins, are brutal men. They'll know of your search here; probably they know now. They have friends in the coast towns who keep them informed of everything. They would think nothing of killing me and you alike, were the treasure to be found."

She was so terribly in earnest about it that I smiled.

"They're not the only ones. Take Gondy's sister-in-law, Félice, a beautiful but savage young woman. She's tried to do us in more than once, and has come close to effecting it. She hates us consumingly, has followed us about, and would pounce suddenly."

The hazel eyes widened on me. "A woman? And hates you?"

I told her about Félice, more to get her mind off her own troubles and to amuse her, than for any other reason. All three of us fervently hoped we had seen the last of Félice.

Jealousy, greed for gold, hatred of us because she had failed to injure us—what motives moved Félice de Gondy? Perhaps all. She had succeeded in getting away with our first detector, though it was ruined and useless to her; she knew all about it and coveted it fiercely, being well aware of its possibilities.

"That woman should be locked up," said Donna Marina firmly.

I laughed. "You're telling me? However, she's not around here, I trust."

"So I thought about those precious cousins of mine," she rejoined. "Yet they come, when least expected. They seem to know all that goes on here. One cannot prevent leaks."

MURCHISON and Gondy now appeared. They had delayed to put the Baby together, and now came pushing it gayly along.

We had secured, while in Genoa, a light wicker perambulator frame in which to house the batteries and instrument; it was high off the ground, but for our purposes this mattered not at all. Our detector used no magnetic principle. We had a practical and extremely mobile affair now, eminently suited to our projects.

Donna Marina was delighted with everything, as we showed her how the gadget worked and put it through its paces for her. We had not built it for depths; the electronic rays had a limit of forty feet, farther than we ever proposed to dig.

But as we worked it for our hostess, explaining how, on radar principles, the waves kicked back and registered

on the dials when encountering obstacles, and how we had charted these results, which varied with the substance encountered, so that we could tell with fair accuracy what the obstacle was, the tiny buzzer rang. Something had been struck. We read the dials, consulted the chart, and found that rock had been encountered at thirty-two feet.

"Right!" cried Donna Marina, clapping her hands. "There is solid rock under us, my friends—the soil goes down for only thirty feet! Your *enfant du diable* is proven right!"

"Child of the devil, sure enough!" growled Murchison. "Now we'll have to do some adjusting, Bill Carson. Use the weaker set of tubes, eh?"

"Right," I said. "A fifteen-foot depth is all we need here."

We accompanied Donna Marina in to luncheon. She was sadly frail, it appeared; if she worked or moved about during the morning, her injured back became very painful and she had to remain in bed for the rest of the day, so the meal was her farewell to us.

The interior of her house was charming, simple, rich with all sorts of wood-carving, and arranged for her convenience. There was little elegance; she said frankly that money was scarce hereabouts. Bookcases were everywhere, low ones which she could reach herself. Aside from the manservant who had met us, two women kept house for her.

So, the meal over, we made our farewells for the day. We were remaining to work, of course, and were made entirely free of the place to follow our own devices. These were simple. We went back to the garden, got the Baby adjusted, and went to work.

Sunset found us walking home over the hill trail, with nothing discovered.

Thus began a round of pleasant, fruitless days which we enjoyed enormously. Sometimes we went to work over the hill trail, other times we walked the *plage* and around the cape to Andora-on-the-Sea, and up the stony Merula valley with its pools and oleanders. We left the Baby in charge of Donna Marina, at night; the walk back and forth was excellent for us all.

Usually we lunched with Donna Marina, and to this end carried delicacies, staples or wine to eke out her table. She would bring Beppo into the garden and sit talking with us, or we would separate and sit indoors with her, where Beppo's scandalous conversation was limited to Scriptural passages and prayers; he never swore in the house, thanks to her training, and out of it never did anything else.

Sometimes she would turn the bird loose in the garden. He would flash among the trees like a radiant green streak; and once, unaware of him, I

got a bad start on hearing from the tree above me part of the Gospel of St. John in a priestly voice. The bird could imitate anyone, and one day at luncheon Gondy was horrified to hear his own voice outside the window telling a scandalous story in French.

Donna Marina, however, laughed, until she cried.

AS for finding gold, we got no "farder." Yet the lack of success did not worry us, fantastic as the statement may sound. We were living an ideal life in our quiet cottage, with plenty of sea-bathing; and each day the excursion up the valley of the Merula to the Borno house was like a new adventure into unguessed possibilities. Here I must speak chiefly for myself. Although we all shared the feeling, I think mine was the strongest—a sense of attachment, even of affection, for our hostess there.

An intimacy upgrew between us. We had got on well from the very start; this crippled woman was an amazing creature, all brain and intuition and gentle fantasy. She had no bitterness, except toward those cousins of hers. Her mind was like a poised, darting, flashing hummingbird, flitting in all directions, balanced upon wings invisible though reaching out with delicate surety of touch. She, who knew so little of life, yet knew everything. I found myself, in our talks, baring my inmost self to her, my personal problems, the little things in my life which were hidden. Why? Because she could explain them all to me, as one explains the perplexities of life to a child.

I swear she had an insight, a perceptive wisdom, not of this world. She would take some incident of my career, perhaps of my family life or my schooldays, and hold it up and twist it until every facet flashed with reflected light; and it would be understood. Why this habit arose, or that friendship died, and so forth. Little unimportant things of enormous influence. She would have made a marvelous psychiatrist—and it was all mere intuition, an inner wisdom. Or she would wheel her chair around the house-walls and pointing to each of the carved puppets, tell who they were and their life-history—not the external life-and-death, but the inward character and failure and success, and why.

She liked Gondy for his courtly manners and his fineness of quality. When Murchison spent an hour or two with her, he came away a different man, all his sarcasm hushed. How she could scratch away the top-soil and reach down to the true substratum of values in anyone! She was no Pollyanna, though. She showed me how she had tucked that shotgun under her arm with its stock against the

wall, so she could fire it without being shattered by the recoil; and she laughed heartily over the way she had peppered the country cousins.

As she had said at our first meeting, within these walls existed only a happy peace. She, who suffered daily, created happiness all around her; it was remarkable.

I am dilating on these things, because they had a vital bearing on what happened later. You will recall how, after the war, the French occupied this frontier strip of Italy; Washington and London were trying to crowd them out, especially after the trouble in Syria. Consequently, things here were a bit uncertain. A lot of Italian patriots, like the cousins, had taken to the hills, gone clear off the reservation, and were raising hell from time to time.

Naturally, among ourselves we frequently discussed Donna Marina. We had done pretty well for ourselves with our invention; we had come away from Venice, for example, with a whacking lot of gold coin, our share of the work in those parts, and while the Baby had been an expensive luxury, like all babies, we had plenty of loot on hand and were not sure how we would get it safely out of the country or turned into bank balances.

ONE evening at supper, after another day's fruitless search, Gondy spoke up.

"I'd like to ask you chaps about something," he said, with an oddly awkward hesitation. "The chances are looking slimmer and slimmer for that Borno gold. If this project proves to be a failure, what's going to happen?"

"We'll worry along," I rejoined cheerfully. "We've got plenty in the bag."

"I wasn't thinking of us," he said, "but of Donna Marina."

"Oh, her!" said Murchison, and avoided my eye. "Hm! I've been kind of dreading, myself, the idea of going away and leaving her empty-handed. I suppose, Bill, to a practical guy like you, it sounds silly."

"The hell with you and how it sounds," I told him. "All that the future holds for this gal is the possibility of rolling into Johns Hopkins or the Mayos and walking out on her own two feet. And you goddamned nuts may laugh, but I asked her yesterday if—if she'd let me send her to the United States—and she wouldn't."

"No, of course; pride," said Gondy. "She wouldn't."

"Hell, Bill, we're not laughing," growled Murchison, squinting at me. "No, we're not laughing at all. Don't get us wrong, you big bear-cub."

"Look, boys," spoke up Gondy, very cheerfully now, "I have a suggestion,

a perfect one, I think. Why not take the gold coin we have on hand, which is unsafe anyhow, knocking around with us, and box it up, and—discover it? Of course, her pride would make us take half the loot, according to agreement, so we'd have to figure carefully—"

"Holy smoke, you've hit it!" I exclaimed. "Eh, Murch? What d'you say?"

He nodded, his thin features brightening. "It's a go, you bet!"

We discussed it. The scheme was flawless from any angle. Donna Marina, of course, would fiercely resent anything that hinted at pity or at charity, so we had to do the job with great care.

First, for the money; we found there was ample in our treasury. Gondy was deputed to scout around town, get the proper kind of a box, age it with acids, and pack the gold.

"I'll do that tomorrow," he said. "It'll weigh like the devil. How'll you manage to bury it without her knowing?"

"We'll do that next day," Murchison said. "Carry it up there in the car and leave it. She always takes a nap after lunch. Tote it in then and bury it in that shallow pond. It'll be a quick job."

"Will the Baby work through water?" queried Gondy. "Radar waves don't, I understand."

"Our first model did; remember, we tested it?" I put in. "Besides, that won't matter a hang. She won't know enough about it to raise the question. But what about the bottom of that pond? We don't want to lose the box in the mud."

"It's not mud, but sand," said Murchison. "Old man Borno made the artificial pond because of the spring in that corner; she said he was a clever old guy, and he was. There's a pipe under the wall that'll carry off the water, with a lever to open it. She told me about it the other day. But we can't drain off the water before planting the gold."

"Speaking of the pond," I spoke up. "We've covered nearly all the place except that. Hadn't we better search it first, with the Baby?"

"And then go back and find our plant? Not much," Murchison objected. "That would look phony to her. Still, we ought to search it."

"Suppose I get the box fixed up tomorrow," said Gondy. "Next day, we'll get it planted, in the afternoon. That'll be Saturday. On Sunday, if she doesn't object to our working then, we can go wading with the Baby and search the area thoroughly before turning up our salted mine—strike it the last thing. Eh?"

We already knew Donna Marina had no objection to Sunday labor, of

our variety, so this settled everything satisfactorily.

In the morning, Murchison and I went up over the hill trail, leaving Gondy to make his preparations. When we came to the crest and paused to get our wind, looking down over the empty, stony valley, Murchison cackled out a laugh.

"You're a funny guy, Bill! You know, I figured you'd be the obstacle to this fake business. Instead, you're all for it."

"And I thought you'd be the one to crab about any such charitable use of our loot," I said. We looked at each other and grinned. Murch was a great guy, actually.

THAT night Gondy had it fixed up—a beautiful job; he had even disinterred an ancient box rotten with mold, and had packed the gold in half-rotted sacking. We chucked it in the Fiat on Saturday morning and went by what Murch called "the large way." He liked to show off how much he had picked up in London, during our war stay there; that was the expression used in 17th Century London to denote going home by way of the river, or some such nonsense.

We toiled the car up the shore road to the new Andora, then around and up the Merula valley to the ancient town ruins, and so to the Borno place. All morning we snooped around the garden with the Baby, cleaning up places we had missed while Donna Marina looked on and Beppo, who was in a pious mood, sat on a branch near her chair and intoned Gregorian chants and snatches of Latin prayers. When I looked her, she gave me a radiant smile.

"Well, it doesn't look as though we were going to discover any treasure, does it?"

"Never say die till the last dog's hung, Donna Marina," I replied cheerfully.

"I'll be very sorry for your sake, if we fail," she said. "You boys have put a lot of effort into this search."

"We'll be sorry for your sake, which makes it even and does none of us any particular good," I said, and she laughed softly. "We haven't touched that lower corner of the garden, where the pool is. We'll tackle that tomorrow."

"Say, tomorrow afternoon, then," she said. "I'll rest in the morning. Come to lunch, and we'll make an afternoon of it together."

"And meet failure with a smile. Eh?"

"Of course." Her brown, impish features were alight. "What else?"

"Orate, fratres!" croaked that green devil from his perch on a branch overhead. "Orate, fratres! Pax vobiscum!"





They must have stolen in very quietly. We were caught, with no possible evasion or escape.

"Shut up," I snapped. "Shut up, Beppol!"

"Go to hell," he rejoined, with some additions in French.

Donna Marina chuckled.

"You're spoiling my poor bird, Mr. Carson! If I go to America, what shall I do with him?"

"Take him to Hollywood and you'll be rich," I told her. "He'll support you in luxury there."

"Don't you want to let the water drain out of that pond before you search it?" she asked, with sudden remembrance. "It can be done easily."

"Not unless we find something. We can wade around with the Baby—the water's only a foot deep at most."

I never saw her more cheerful and gay, even though she must have felt in her heart that we would have no luck. We lunched as usual, and she trundled off in her chair for her nap. We had a smoke, to give her time to

get asleep; then Gondy and I fetched in the box from the car and Murchison joined us at the pool.

To bury it under the water, was more of a job than we had figured, but one spot was a natural for the purpose. The water came in a little bay to the foot of a big chunk of lava weathered into fantastic shapes, and we could get at the water from two sides; so we fell to work there. Damping out the water with sand and mud, we worked fast and got the hole dug—just a shallow one, naturally. We dumped in the box, scraped sand over it, and let in the water anew, and everything was neat as a pin again.

THAT afternoon we finished with the garden; we had combed every square foot of ground, even around the trees. There was still the chance that we would turn up the Borno treasure in the pool, of course, but

none of us had much hope. It was a good bet that old Borno had not buried his gold there at all, but somewhere else.

We drove home to our Laigueglia cottage and a supper of *fecchini* and "red ink," and there Gondy found a letter awaiting him. It was from his father, in France, and it had news of his sister-in-law, Félice—the infernal female who had stolen our first model and skipped out, unaware that it was useless. She had shown up near Lyons to hunt with it for a supposed treasure there, had got into trouble with the police, and had disappeared, leaving the gadget behind.

"Now she'll probably trail us once more," Murchison said gloomily. "She hates us like poison. She'll probably guess why we let her have the no-good gadget."

"Well, we should worry!" cried Gondy, laughing. "She's not here:

that's certain. If she shows up later on, we can thumb our noses at her. So forget her! Good riddance, and well gone."

"Where do we go from here?" I asked him. "This job is about washed up and we'd better be looking ahead. Have you anything in mind?"

Gondy nodded brightly. "Several things. I've been trying to get in touch with one or two friends—may get a wire any day."

He was a religious soul, by spells, and went to church next morning. Murchison and I spent the morning on the *plage*. About noon we climbed into the old Fiat and went chugging around the cape and up the little valley to the Dolls' House.

LUNCHEON was notable. Marco, the wiry old servant, waited on table; he and the two women who took care of the house were going visiting for the afternoon. We would have the place to ourselves.

After the meal, Gondy took Donna Marina's chair out to the garden, while I followed with the Baby. I noticed that the wicker top was pulled down over the body of the thing, but paid it no attention. We assembled at the lower end of the garden, near the pool; the high eucalypti made wavy patterns of shade and sunlight around us and their fragrance was pleasant.

Donna Marina swept us all with a twinkling glance.

"Well, gentlemen! I have a small parting gift; it is all I can offer you. Why not take a look at that Baby of yours?"

I pulled back the wicker cover, and we stood staring.

Over the batteries and mechanism had been neatly tucked a white knitted cover. And on this cover lay three of Donna Marina's precious puppets, each one exquisitely fashioned. There was Gondy, slim and mustached and smiling, to the very life. There was Murchison, skinny and rather sardonic, a speaking likeness; and there was Bill Carson, clumsy and heavy-set with even his missing front tooth showing.

These were not just toys. They represented long stolen hours of the most delicate work imaginable. They held great artistry, a merry and elfin genius; love had gone into their making, as we realized full well. She could have given us no gift that meant more. For a moment or two we were pretty awkward in expressing our thanks—until suddenly old Murch stood down over her chair and kissed her smack on the lips. Then he stood up, scarlet, stammering, confused—and we all roared with laughter; then Gondy and I followed his example, by invitation.

After that we took off shoes and sox, turned up our trousers, and went at the shallow pond with the Baby by turns. Beppo, who had been turned loose, flitted about like a radiant green flame in the sunlight, losing himself for an hour or two at a time in the trees or squawking insults at other birds. I took the first trick, then let Murchison take over and went back and sat with Donna Marina.

"Silly fellows!" she said, her eyes dancing. "To waste kisses on a useless creature in a wheel-chair!"

"You're beautiful," I said. "Beauty isn't looks; life isn't a cinema. Beauty is harmony and peace, a rhythmic unity. These carvings of yours express it, like music. They have a perfect unity, with no discordant note. That's what Murch was trying to say."

"I like the compliment, even if it doesn't say much for your morals."

"I believe with Huxley that morals were invented by man. They're unknown in nature."

"You have a glib tongue," she said lightly, but I saw she was pleased.

We had left the knitted coverlet and the three dolls in the carriage; they did not interfere with the gadget. Time passed; the area under water was being thoroughly searched, and nothing had turned up. Gondy took over; we had agreed that he was to find the cache.

Donna Marina kept up her vivacious air, but with an effort. She knew that this was our last day together; the search had failed. But, if her disappointment were acute, she gave no sign of it. We watched Gondy coming closer to the little bay. At length he rolled the Baby slap over it and halted, getting out his cigarettes and starting to speak.

The buzzer sounded. He jumped a foot. Murchison was on his feet with a yell. I ran forward to examine the dials, pulling up the white coverlet to look at them—mere pretense, of course.

"We've got it! We've got it!" I cried, and looked up at Donna Marina. She had pulled herself up in the chair and was leaning forward, her brown merry features alive with excitement.

We marked the spot, pushed the Baby back, and grabbed for the spades at hand. We put on a splendid act, if I do say it, getting in each other's way and scrabbling at the sand, until Donna Marina told us to dam back the water out of the bay. So we did, and then went at the digging furiously, laughing and chattering.

We got up the rotten box, and smashed it open with a spade, and poured handfuls of gold coins into Donna Marina's lap. She laughed and cried, embraced each of us, and if we needed any reward for our fakery, we had it then and there from her

glorious happiness. America? She was going just as quickly as she could make arrangements! Then she insisted on dividing the gold into the agreed amounts—and while we were doing this, the country cousins arrived! We were, naturally, concentrated wholly on what we were doing.

They must have stolen in very quietly, having found the gate unlocked. The first we knew of their presence was when Alessandro, a mop-headed giant, burst into a laugh. He and Timoteo, another mop-head, held German Lugers trained on us. Half a dozen more ragged bandits, armed with all sorts of weapons, had spread out around us. We were caught, with no possible evasion or escape.

"Hands up!" roared Alessandro. "You with the others, witch!"

He meant Donna Marina. She was not afraid of him; she flew into a fury, and the garden rang with a flood of Italian like drumming rain. Not a word of the dialect could we understand. Gondy, no less excitable, flung himself into the argument and got knocked senseless for his pains. Donna Marina screamed, and fainted.

Well, our gold was gone. Alessandro and Timoteo were scooping it into their pockets and while Murchison knelt over Gondy, I talked to the precious pair. They could savvy my Italian, and in a way were not such bad eggs. They agreed to let us take Donna Marina and Gondy into the house, and to leave it untouched; possession of the gold had put them into high good humor. Timoteo even agreed to help with Gondy, whose scalp had been badly cut, and picked him up in his arms. This was not pure charity; he wanted that shotgun Donna Marina owned, and this cut the last faint hope out from under me. I had meant to get my hands on that gun myself.

I TOOK Donna Marina's chair, Murchison helping. Timoteo followed with Gondy, and I was thankful poor Donna Marina remained unconscious. We were a pretty glum lot.

We got into the house. Donna Marina's room was at the far end, overlooking the garden, and I pushed her chair there and left her; she was better off as she was. Timoteo followed with Gondy and laid him on the bed, and demanded the shotgun. Murchison found and gave it to him, and with a grin he stamped out.

"This is a hell of a note!" growled Murch. "Leave Gondy be; he'll come around. What are they doing?"

A squabble of voices resounded. I went to the big window and he joined me. The whole gang were around Alessandro and Timoteo, screaming for a division of the loot. For a moment we thought hopefully trouble

would develop, but the two Bornos grinned and began to hand out money. *Our money, dammit!* We both cursed in heartfelt agony.

Suddenly Murch grabbed my arm and erupted in fresh profanity. One of those mugs let out a yelp and a laugh, went to the Baby, and began to push the buggy. Others gathered around and halted him.

"My Lord, they'll ruin it!" gasped Murch.

"They can't hurt it," I told him. "They have no idea what it is—good God, Murch! What's happened?"

Something had happened; for a moment we could not discover what. The whole group of men froze; fear and terror leaped into their faces. Then they began to cross themselves.

"Sorcery! Sorcery!" cried out one of them in a voice of horror. "It is her doing! She will do it to us too—it is sorcery!"

AT this moment a shrill yell pealed out above them:

"The police! *The carabinieri!* Run, you bastards—run! The police!"

A vivid green streak shot through the air, but none of them saw it. Already seared stiff, they let out a chorus of howls and broke. Timoteo dropped the shotgun and led the rout, still crossing himself, for the gates.

"Good for Beppo!" grunted Murchison. "Hey, Bill! They'll catch on pretty quick—hop out and get that shotgun—I'll try to lock the gates—"

The window was open, and of course, this being Italy, was unscreened. I jumped out and legged it to where the shotgun lay. It was loaded. I scooped it up and then turned and put after the gang. Murchison was not even out of the house yet when I came past, and going by our Fiat, sprinted down the drive.

The whole gang were at the gates, fighting to get out. I ducked behind a tree and let them have both barrels. A chorus of screams went up, and those bandits evaporated like nobody's business. Murchison came along, we got the gates shut and locked, then stood looking at each other and panting.

"But the gold went with 'em," mourned Murch. "Let's go get the Baby safe, then look after our hospital cases. What started the gang off on that sorcery business?"

"Search me," I said. We hiked back down to the lower garden. The Baby still stood where it had been halted, over the hole we had dug in the sand. I stopped dead.

"Murch! Look! That explains it—"

Even in this bitter moment, we could not restrain a laugh. The cover of the carriage had been pushed back,

and there on the white coverlet lay the three little replicas of me and Murch and Gondy. Sorcery, indeed! Those nitwits had taken for granted that we had been bewitched and changed into dolls—and Beppo had done the rest.

Suddenly Murchison froze. "Bill! Do you hear what I hear?"

I listened, and jumped forward. We had not thought to switch off the Baby, which in consequence was still running. And the buzzer was sounding repeatedly, over and over!

"What does it mean?" Murch gaped at me. "Has the thing gone nuts?"

"My gosh, man!" I exclaimed, pointing. "Don't you see? This is the best place we found to plant that gold. It was the best place old Borno found, likewise. Look at the dials! Let's see if they register gold—"

They did. Gold, ten feet down, deeper than we had put our box. . . .

We reloaded the shotgun, revived Gondy, and put him in charge. Donna Marina we dared not touch: she was apparently all right, except for the fainting, so we left her and while Gondy stood watch at the gates,

Murch and I went to digging. We stripped to the waist and worked like fools, forgetful of everything else.

Beppo came and perched on the Baby and did some fancy cursing. We got deeper and deeper. At last we struck a box and tugged it out of the hole; there was another beneath it. They were stout, iron-bound chests, three in all. When we got them out in the westerling sunlight, we were so completely fagged out that we just dropped.

"Well, aren't you going to look at them?" asked a voice.

"Go to hell!" I gasped. "That damned parrot is imitating Donna Marina now."

"It's a damned good imitation," she said, laughing. We looked up, and there she was in her wheel-chair. Then Gondy came, reporting that the last he had seen of the gang they had broken up and gone every which way. He was struck dumb at sight of the boxes, then seized a spade and went at one, and got it smashed open.

And once more, that afternoon, there was a flood of gold coin in the sunlight, and it revived us completely.

"Well, gentlemen, this is more like it," said Donna Marina, fingering the coins we had dumped in her lap. She was quite all right; she had come around by herself, and had come out to find us. "Yes, this is much more like it."

"Like what?" I asked.

Her eyes twinkled at us and she broke into a laugh.

"More like the money that my grandfather buried in 1887. I meant to ask you," she said, "when we were interrupted by those bandits, how it happened that the first box we discovered contained modern money. Did you forget that all gold coins are dated?"

We looked at her, then at each other; and then—well, we were too confused even to lie gracefully. We just confessed everything.

THAT night when we got home it was late. A telegram was awaiting Gondy. He read it and looked up, his eyes dancing.

"Boys! Here's something good! It's from an old friend of mine, one of the chaps I was trying to reach. He's at a place near Penmarch, on the coast south of Brest. Strange people there—the Bigoudins, a race older than the Bretons or Celts—older than the Druids, even!"

"The hell with it," said Murchison. "I'm thinking about saying good-by to Donna Marina."

I nodded. "Right. So am I. And I move that we stick with her until we see her safe aboard a boat for America!"

We did, too.

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Should the Olympic

No!

by BUD
CORNISH

A well-known sports-writer cites many instances (once a French boxer *bit* his opponent!) of rivalry provoking ill will.

HAVE the Olympic Games bred more discontent than a marked deck in an Army poker game? Or are they the good-will builders that boys who make the pilgrimages as winned and dined officials insist they are?

The fence has two sides—but a look at the record shows some basis for the advocating, in some quarters, that the Games be heaved off the nearest dock for at least twenty-five years. Even the London *Star*, a top newspaper, is in agreement with this procedure.

Daniel Ferris, secretary of the U. S. Amateur Athletic Union, maintains the Games may be revived in 1948. But should they be? Have they succeeded—or have they had practically every country haired up at one time or another like a Down East lumberjack without a razor?

Let's go back as far as Jim Thorpe, who was one of the United States' outstanding athletes of 1912—and of history. That Carlisle Indian who could skim a hurdle, run long or short distances, pole vault, high jump and probably stand on his head and recite the Gettysburg Address while drinking a glass of water, was the sensation of Stockholm, where the Games were held. . . . And then—

And then it was discovered that James, the old so-and-so, had played a game of baseball somewhere and accepted a gratuity for this service

rendered. Arched brows of the amateur officials looked like parentheses turned on their sides, and horrified, the noble arbiters stripped Thorpe of all his medals. The protesting countries were happy—perhaps.

International good-will?

In Paris, in 1924, the Olympics produced a situation that had the *gendarmier* bewildered and wondering whether to call out the army. The English middleweight champion was fighting the French champion, and the Englishman was winning from here to Hoboken on a kiddie-car. The Frenchman was definitely outclassed that he lost his head and bit the Englishman on the chest. The pay-off and near free-for-all came when the Frenchman actually received the decision.

In 1928, the Games were held in Amsterdam, Holland, which is a beautiful country with pretty windmills, pretty tulips and pretty girls. Yet before the Olympics could even get under way, a Dutch Olympic Stadium gatekeeper punched a French Olympic official squarely upon his proboscis!

That punch was almost as fateful as the 1914 workout on the Archduke at Sarajevo, and brought on a controversy of diplomatic proportions. The French became so peeved that they withdrew from the Stadium parade, and it took the best minds and a government apology for the sock on the nose to placate the offended Gauls.

In fact, 1928 was quite a year! Over here, there's nobody friendlier than Americans and Canadians. We talk of our far-flung border with nary a fort or gun, and we visit back and forth like cousins. Yet the Canadians, among our best friends, took off and yelled at what they considered the favoritism being shown the Yanks, and the Americans yelled back. We had to go to Europe to get into an argument with our next-door neighbor through the medium of the Olympic (good-will) Games!

Not only do the Olympics toss countries at each other's throats; they even get fellow-countrymen fighting among themselves. The Olympics caused the censure of Queen Wilhelmina of Holland in that so-hecktic 1928 when the wardens of the Amsterdam Christian Reformed Church took pens in hand and composed a letter calling down Her Majesty for awarding prizes to winners in the games on a Sunday. It was the first time an individual parish had ever dared question the Queen!

The Yanks didn't do too well in Holland, and everyone connected with the team began backbiting everybody else; from claiming that the Olympic trial system before the Games—held here in America—was too tiring and left the boys stale, to shrieking that the athletes were not kept on rigid enough diets. The London *Evening Standard* joined the hullabaloo the Americans themselves kicked up by printing, under a full-page streamer, the "secret of the failure of the United States Olympic team." Said the *Standard*: "Lavish feeding, it is suggested, led to the undoing of the American team." But Yanks didn't like to be criticized by Europeans, even though they criticized themselves.

CERTAINLY the Olympics bred no friendly feeling between the United States and our enemy-to-be Japan in 1928; though to the credit of America we gave them a lesson in sportsmanship—that they never learned.

The Japanese were caught cheating at Amsterdam, and the man they fouled was "Chesty Joe" Ray, in his day the Cunningham, San Romani, Haegg, Andersson, Dodds of the milers. The Japanese, confronted with the proof, brazenly admitted it, and seemed to gloat over a deliberate foul, an anything-to-win attitude.

Thirty-one of the thirty-two competing nations, other than Japan, voted to throw the Sons of Nippon right out on their yellow noses for the violation of what is supposed to be the cardinal Olympic rule—sportsmanship. And why weren't they thrown out? Because American representatives before the Olympic Committee asked that the Japs be allowed to continue in competition, so that the actions of a few would not reflect on an entire nation. But they only thought we were weak and foolish.

Ironically, the head of the American Olympic team, later to give the Japs payment the hard way, was General Douglas MacArthur!

Was a friendlier feeling engendered by America's sporting refusal to force Japan out? Any swimming official can tell you that in 1932 the Japs were still cheating. They were caught giving their swimmers oxygen just before sending them into the water, a direct violation of the Olympic rules. The Japs got, from the Olympics, only hate for the soft (to them) countries that believed in sportsmanship, and per-

Games Be Continued?

haps the erroneous impression that never-beaten America was softest of all.

When the United States held the Games in 1932, several countries threatened to withdraw because the Olympic Committee, going against the International Amateur Athletic Federation, decided to bar feminine athletes except in tennis and yachting. With a battle-cry, "What? No women?" this obstacle was finally overcome with only a few hurt feelings and some distaff-side wails that had the males trembling in their brogans.

Even the United States, which put on as near-perfect an Olympics as any country—says we—had its troubles in the winter events at Lake Placid, New York. The Scandinavian skaters protested the United States methods of running the meet in man-to-man fashion. The Scandinavians wanted to skate in lanes and against time, as in the homeland; and the Yanks, at the man-to-man business, were either giving them the elbow on the corners (they implied), or outdistancing them when the pressure was on (which was obvious).

When the re-running of one heat was ordered because the skaters were loafing, Armas Palmroos, leader of the Finns, branded it "The silliest thing ever heard of. Such action will be the talk of Europe tomorrow!" Great friendship-building, eh?

But all of this, of course, was tame stuff to the 1936 Games, which were held in Germany, with Adolf Hitler the Bum of Berchtesgaden, as host.

BEFORE the Olympics even started, Hitler had begun his terrorism. Jewish leaders called for secession from the Games, and Jewish athletes were requested not to compete. The United States had to demand that there would be no acts against Jewish-Americans who did win places on the team. Imagine! Having to demand permission to use Americans on an American team!

So into this hotbed of hate went the team of 1936, and the Games turned out to be, greatly, an effort by Hitler to impress the world with his might, and how German Aryans were the super-duper men. Uncle Sam's athletes and others crammed the superman nonsense down Ad's throat at the time, but it didn't make for better feeling anywhere.

Then Der Fuehrer, with his supermen being buffeted, suddenly found

himself in a predicament. On the United States team was one of our great athletes,—Jesse Owens the Buckeye Bullet,—a Negro with gazelle-like speed. Owens began to make a one-man show of the short events; and Hitler, who was there to present medals, discovered he had urgent business elsewhere when it came time to decorate Owens. And so the Negro race of America was insulted by a crackpot painter who had sold Germany a bill of goods. Again the Olympics had stirred up ill-feeling.

Even before the American team arrived in Europe in 1936, a semi-scandal-broke about the training routine of that sparkling swimmer, Eleanor Holm. There were charges and counter-charges; and finally, with two camps on one team bitter over the incident, Miss Holm was barred. . . .

Of course, over the years, there has always been a battle over how the events should be measured. The majority of the countries use the metric system, and run one hundred meters instead of one hundred yards, or four hundred meters instead of the four-hundred-forty-yard dash. This often puts the Americans at a disadvantage.

One group of Yanks will yodel for us to adopt the metric system, and another will yelp to stop imitating Europe. Every four years the Games brought the squabble between the "meter-men" and the "yard-birds" to a head. But from a European angle, the United States has always been pig-headed, because it won't adopt the standard of the majority.

They are now talking the Games of 1948. And yet, in 1945, when Gunder Haegg ran his four-minute, one-and-four-tenths-second mile on the Malmoe track, American sports-writers in several cases leaped to their typewriters and began hammering out that the Swedes were timing with alarm-clocks, and how could Haegg, who couldn't win in America, suddenly find his form as soon as he got home? That probably has the Swedes loving a lot of us for our sportsmanship!

There you have it. Maybe, underneath, the Games do develop the camaraderie that the world is seeking. But it doesn't show on the records! And maybe the London *Star*, and yours truly, can recruit some votes in the United States for postponing the next Olympic Games for a quarter of a century. . . . And then, brother, forgetting 'em for twenty-five more years!

Yes!

by DANIEL
FERRIS

It's better to run for medals than to shoot for them, says the secretary of the U. S. Amateur Athletic Union.

WHAT this country needs is not only a good five-cent cigar but a good press for the Olympic Games.

Things have come to a pretty pass when some carpers point out that the Olympic Games do not prevent wars and hint that they should be abolished. That is as absurd and ridiculous as would be talk of abandoning religion because it has failed to avert wars.

If we analyze the criticisms against the Olympic Games we find that they boil down to oversensational reporting. Incidents are magnified out of all proportion and the doubtful features are always brought to light. One might say that the campaign is already starting to confuse the issue of the 1948 Olympics. Let me explain this quickly.

Recently, the Manchester *Guardian* said that the 1948 Olympics should be staged by Finland, rather than England, a leading contender. What happened after that? Well, a leading press service picked up the story, and it was played up nationally in this country as if the cantankerous Olympics were steaming up trouble again. I assure you that the international Olympic body will settle the simple question of location of the next Olympics without too much delay. Why all the blather and the subtle implications?

But that is how it goes all along the line. When Eleanor Holm was banished from the Olympic team in 1936, for a plain infraction of the rules, you might have thought that American womanhood was trampled in the dust. Headlines ran wild. Bulletins and communiqués were issued on the hour. All of the good, all of the solid sportsmanship which had been manifested throughout the United States in the assembling of the team was never mentioned or brought out.

Why is there this sort of slanting? Well, frankly speaking, these sports atrocity stories are written, not by regular reporters covering the news, but by feature-writers who seek only the sensational. They figure that such stories have greater news value and build them up accordingly. Thus if a fine Finnish runner beats out Ralph Hill in an exciting five-thousand-meter race no stress is given to the time or other competitive angles. Oh, no—the emphasis is put on the possibility of a foul and it is implied that Finnish and American diplomats will meet at twenty paces the next morning.

I could cite instance after instance. When Dorando was helped across the line by some Englishmen in the London Olympics of 1908, there was a question of disqualification which would enable Johnny Hayes of the U.S.A. to triumph. The problem was so outrageously presented in print to the unwary reader that he momentarily awaited a bulletin that there would be a replay of the War of 1812. In actuality, however, there was no such tenseness.

SPACE forbids my listing many examples. But here is the important point I want to establish—at the stadium itself, in the Olympic Village where the athletes live, on the scene of competition, there is little friction. One must wait for the papers to find out what was the "incident" of the day before. I do not think that is a proper attitude on the part of the press.

Nothing in this world is perfect and you can stress the black in anything to a sufficient degree to obscure the white. Yet the long tradition of the Olympic Games prove their vitality. In ancient Greece they ran from 776 B.C. until the Fourth Century A.D. The modern games were revived in 1896. They were suspended during the first World War and were revived at Antwerp in 1920. The last games of the modern series were held at Berlin in 1936, and now plans are under way to stage them once more in 1948, probably in London.

Los Angeles, Detroit and Philadelphia have been anxious to hold the 1948 Olympics, but this would be fi-

nancially impractical for the countries which suffered during the war. While they might not be able to make the trip here they certainly could be represented abroad. Hence, a European site would be desirable.

WHATEVER the site, the Olympics should be perpetuated. But they should be conducted with the co-operation of a radio and a press which will not play up the dubious angles but which will concentrate on all of the better elements of the Olympics. After all, they do make for better understanding among nations. A Paavo Nurmi, a Sonja Henie of Norway, a Jan Kusocinski of Poland, bring forward some of the achievements of smaller nations.

Hammer away at these points. Show how the Olympic Village finds athletes of all nations living together, training together and getting together. I have seen the many friendships created among these athletes and among officials, and I have seen innumerable examples of excellent sportsmanship. Bad actors? Yes, there are some. I'll admit that. But you'll find them in our leading American sports teams. Yet nobody stopped baseball because of the Chicago White Sox affair, and nobody has killed boxing because of fake fights. In these cases the press rallied magnificently to the cause and looked for a way of salvaging it.

By the same token, half-truths from the press can be most harmful. Some of the stories written accusing Avery Brundage of favoring inviting Germans and Japs proves that some writers don't want to stick to the truth, or else they are not aware of the facts. The International Olympic Committee has nothing to say about the countries which will compete in the games. All the I.O.C., of which Brundage is a member, does is to decide which city shall hold the games and settle on the sports to be included. It is the host city which invites the countries.

As I see it, the health of the Olympics reflects the health of the world generally. A successful Olympics is a barometer of a world moving along peacefully. A potboiling Olympics, an Olympics such as that of Berlin, where the pomp and splendor was used for propaganda purposes, is something to be frowned upon. We must learn from such experiences and shy away from them in the future. But the future is something which will make the Olympics imperative in sports.

I BASE this on the fact that science, the atomic bomb, jet-propulsion planes and all the concomitants, will ultimately reflect in sports. We will

be flying track-teams abroad, and vice versa, as casually as we now travel from New York to Philadelphia for the Penn Relays. Annual international competition will provide the groundwork for the Olympics. Frankly, the more international competition we have, the smoother will be the sailing in the Olympics—providing we have a press which will dwell upon the sports, and not the political facets of the games.

All in all, there are no valid criticisms of the Olympics which cannot be overcome, and there are so many benefits that they are almost incalculable. Just figure what the Olympics do for the young men and women athletes of any country.

Fundamentally, they offer an incentive. There is nothing I can think of which can spark an athlete more than the thought that he may make an Olympic team. This is a steady spur. Of course, there are only a small number eventually selected, but thousands and thousands compete in every section of the land. Even those who are eliminated are physically, mentally and morally the better for having tried, although they have failed.

The attraction for masses of athletes is one of the strongest arguments in favor of the Olympics.

MANY Americans are unaware of the fact that Russia has a nationwide progressive system of sports and has come along rapidly in this respect during the past fifteen years. When you get one hundred fifty thousand athletes in a cross-country race in Moscow, you can realize that Russia realizes the value of sports. No doubt this background had much to do with the improvement of the Red Army.

Track and field and cross-country and similar sports appeal to large groups in all countries. I think we do not lay enough stress on participant sports in the United States. I feel that by cracking against the Olympics, or overplaying incidents, we are hurting many participant pastimes. I think that by hitting at the Olympics we are sharpshooting at one means of international understanding, when international understanding is one of the orders of the day. Unquestionably, we all have to play ball together. One more error might strike all of us right out of the game.

I cast my vote for continuance of the Olympics, and I ask for an intelligent press and radio, working from the top down, to spotlight the games in their proper proportions. The world keeps growing smaller all the time, and it will be much safer to run for medals, rather than to shoot for them.

Will It Happen?

Will we again go soft and fall for enemy propaganda? A story of 1950—

by LAWRENCE
WATKIN

JOHN BURGESS, associate professor in the History Department, dug down into the bottom of the wooden box he kept in his study, his "precious war-chest," his wife Anne called it, and drew forth an object wrapped in a bloodstained handkerchief. This was one souvenir brought back from Germany in 1945 that he never had shown to anybody.

Anne would have been surprised indeed to see soft-spoken, academic "Johnny" fingering a shiny black German Luger, into which he deftly inserted a full clip before slipping the pistol into his hip pocket.

German side-arms seemed particularly inappropriate now in the spring of 1950. The German half of World War II had been over for five years, which was quite long enough for Beauregard College, one of Virginia's more select schools for men, to forget all about it. This year's senior class contained not one student who had ever seen a war. The same could almost be said of the faculty, for though most of those under forty had donned uniforms, few had fought farther afield than the Pentagon or the Navy Department.

John Burgess was one of the exceptions, yet he in no way considered himself to be an exceptional person. Like millions of other Americans, he had waited to be drafted. Then having sent his wife and their three-year-old son Brooke home to her parents

in Buckingham, he entered training at Camp Lee.

Lean and fit at twenty-eight, he was much tougher physically when he emerged a 2nd Louie in the infantry. He shipped overseas, took part in the invasion, was captured east of the Rhine, liberated by his own lightning-swift division the same day, fought across Germany through one city after another, returned for Stateside duty

and honorable discharge before the Japs threw in the sponge.

But that was five years ago. Two years after he had taken up his teaching duties at Beauregard again, not a dozen people at the college could have distinguished between his fighting record and that of Melvin Buckley, who had strained his 20-20 vision over mountains of paper work in Washington. Both had been in the



war. That was all anyone remembered.

He hoped he had not been remembered. That noon he had been introduced briefly to someone he had recognized, but who had not recognized him, clean-shaven as he was and in civilian clothes. John Burgess had a memory like an elephant. And he never had believed in fighting a war for nothing!

"Hurry up, Johnny, or we'll both be late," his wife called up to him.

"Yes'm," he responded, just loud enough for her to hear. Before he descended the stairs, he ran his hand carefully down the back of his suit, to see that no bulge showed.

ANNE was waiting. "Come on, old slow-poke," she said fondly, holding the front door ajar.

He shut it and put his arms around her. "Where you goin', honey?"

"I told you a dozen times you were to drop me off at Jenny Courtney's."

"How about a kiss?" he asked.

"Oh, Johnny! Just when I have my hair combed and my face on!"

"It's only a hen party, isn't it?" He kissed her, lingering over it.

"Say, what's the matter? You want me to play bad bridge?" Anne always said such complimentary things. But though she waited for another caress now, John held her away from him, gripping her shoulders.

"Where's Brooke?" he asked.

"In his bed, silly."

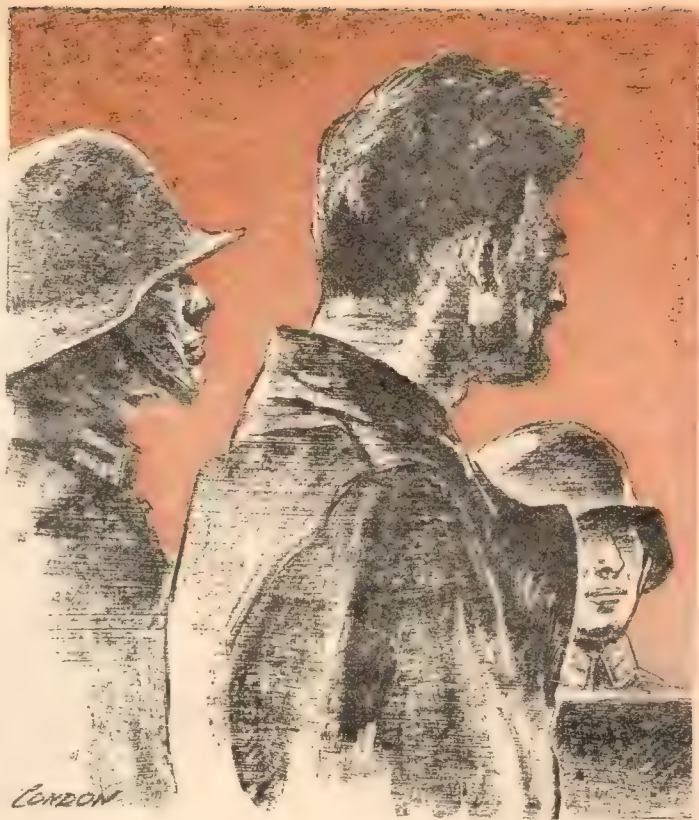
"Is Sweet staying with him?"

"Of course she is. Anyone'd think you were off for Europe."

"I just want to know that everything is all right. I'd like everything to stay exactly like this. A little home, a wife I can kiss, and a son! In a war, you think about that all the time. In peace you take it for granted. I don't ever want to take it for granted."

Anne kissed him this time, and in a way that said to forget the party if he didn't want her to go. But he opened the door firmly, and led her out to the car. It was a new car, and he was proud of its extreme design. He hadn't been ashamed to offer the use of such a car for driving the visiting lecturer to the station, fifteen miles away. It was right after the lecturer had failed to recognize him, that he had made the arrangements. He explained to Anne now that it was his stint, a sort of departmental chore. It might keep him out as late as one o'clock. Anne had better let Milly Carmichael bring her home. She was *not* to wait up for him; he wanted that distinctly understood.

He let her out at the Courtneys' and did not offer to kiss her again, but he smiled evenly. He wondered if he could smile when he returned.



Poulson looked down the barrel of the Luger.

As he drove the rest of the way alone, he was no longer driving down the quiet streets of the university town, but—in reverie—jolting along a German highway in a jeep through nice-looking uncrowded country that contradicted the German plaint for Lebensraum. The forests were pruned like picnic grounds. Last night it had not seemed like war at all. Their command post had music from a radio picked up somewhere along the way, a lot of Jerry stuff, and very good reception over the BBC.

Today was even better. The sun was shining. After the cold and fog and bitter fighting of December and January, now far behind, April was fine. Take the pleasure of looking at healthy, well-built German women. They hated the air you breathed, but there was exhilaration even in that—in being part of a hard-bitten, rampaging outfit, half steamroller of destruction, half triumphal procession.

It was natural that on such a day three of them in a jeep should take a wrong turn that led into the heart of a little town near Gotha, where they tried to bluff an apprehensive crowd of civilians and Volkssturm

into surrender, only to be captured ignominiously by two alert S.S. men.

After the long ride in the German command car, John Burgess was separated from his men, relieved of knife and valuables and given a preliminary interview by an Intelligence officer.

Then two S.S. men marched him across the garrison yard. A Nazi girl danced before, screaming "Amerikan Schwein!" She was silenced by the guards, who led him into the most pretentious building in the camp.

Entering a large, sunny room, containing only a few high-backed baronial chairs and pictures of Party leaders on the walls, he stood face to face with Count Ernst von Krug, one of Hitler's elite, a young man of graceful figure and eyes so blue they made you forget the tight mouth. As Von Krug waited behind the desk, a shaft of sunlight from the curtainless window glinted upon his golden hair, making it shine like an angel's.

JOHN BURGESS, jarted out of his daydream, no longer faced a German inquisitor, but found himself parking his new automobile uneventfully behind the college assembly hall. He



"Let's have it, you little slicked-up Kraut!" he said.

noticed as he was about to enter it an art poster on the bulletin-board advising one and all that Dr. Hans Keller would discuss "The New Germany" tonight at eight-thirty.

Anne had been right. He was late. Robert Harding, whom John vaguely recognized as an officer in the History Club, got up furtively from the end seat in the back row and tiptoed out to the vestibule to welcome him.

"How's it going?" John asked.

"Just great," whispered the boy. He was flushed and excited from what he had heard. "This guy is wonderful," he breathed ecstatically; "really colossal. They're eating it up!"

Without waiting to inquire what they were eating up, John let the student usher slip him into a seat well back of center. Keller was just admitting to service in the Wehrmacht during the campaign that had swept through France. Belgium had been easy because the invading Germans during World War I had impaled so many Flemish babies on their bayonets before barbecuing them over evening campfires that small opposition was left for World War II. He said it with such roguish effrontery, such

a satirical twinkle in his blue eyes, that a ripple of laughter stirred the audience. Then his face grew grave as he pronounced: "Actually, though no army in the field is without brutality, the record will prove that the rank and file of German soldiers were neither irresponsible nor vengeful." And he read from German Army orders to prove it.

DR. KELLER said that it was not until Hitler's Brown Shirts were taken in that the character of the Wehrmacht changed. It was at that point that he, Dr. Keller, deserted, and with a great many other staunch Germans, went underground. Simple yet powerful words told of Germans in whom the love of liberty burned fiercely. In the face of torture and brutish death from the Gestapo, they fought to avenge the enslavement of the kind ones, the good ones.

As the foreign visitor talked, the light of a reading-lamp on the speaker's table glinted upon his golden hair, making it shine like an angel's.

At first the questioning was pleasant and friendly, as befitted two gentlemen of the world exchanging ideas.

Young Count von Krug explained almost apologetically that he was not a skilled interrogator, this being his first experience with it, but that he had requested from Intelligence a prisoner of unusual capabilities for his "purposes." The Herr Professor was a gift from above. Then he launched into a lengthy and irrelevant admission that Germany had lost the war. But she would not lose the peace. The best and most resolute were to go underground until the Western powers themselves would beg for German collaboration to oppose the universal menace of Bolshevism.

John Burgess gave ear again to the lecturer, hearing him describe himself as the silent partner of the advancing Yanks. It was he who had stiffened the spine of Köln to rebel against the S.S. order to evacuate that city and aid in its defence. For his pains he had suffered fantastic cruelty at the hands of the Gestapo. He paralleled the abrupt nature of their reprisals with the directness and ruthlessness of the Russians.

Compelling words in an attractive foreign accent cutting sharply into the quiet of the room. . . . American tol-



Half-blinded with dust and falling plaster, he ran, shooting, until he fell heavily and lost consciousness.

erance and understanding—discriminating thinkers who would no more rush to the extreme conclusion that all Germans were depraved than they would side with Wilson in the guiltlessness of the German people—good Germans so ashamed of their German blood that they had spilled it themselves.

Over the gentle, well-favored countenance of Dr. Keller there spread a look of sternness. His eyes flashed, remembering.

Professor John Burgess half shut his eyes. He too remembered. . . . After the general conversation in which Burgess feared he might have editorialized in spite of himself, Von Krug crushed out his cigarette and re-

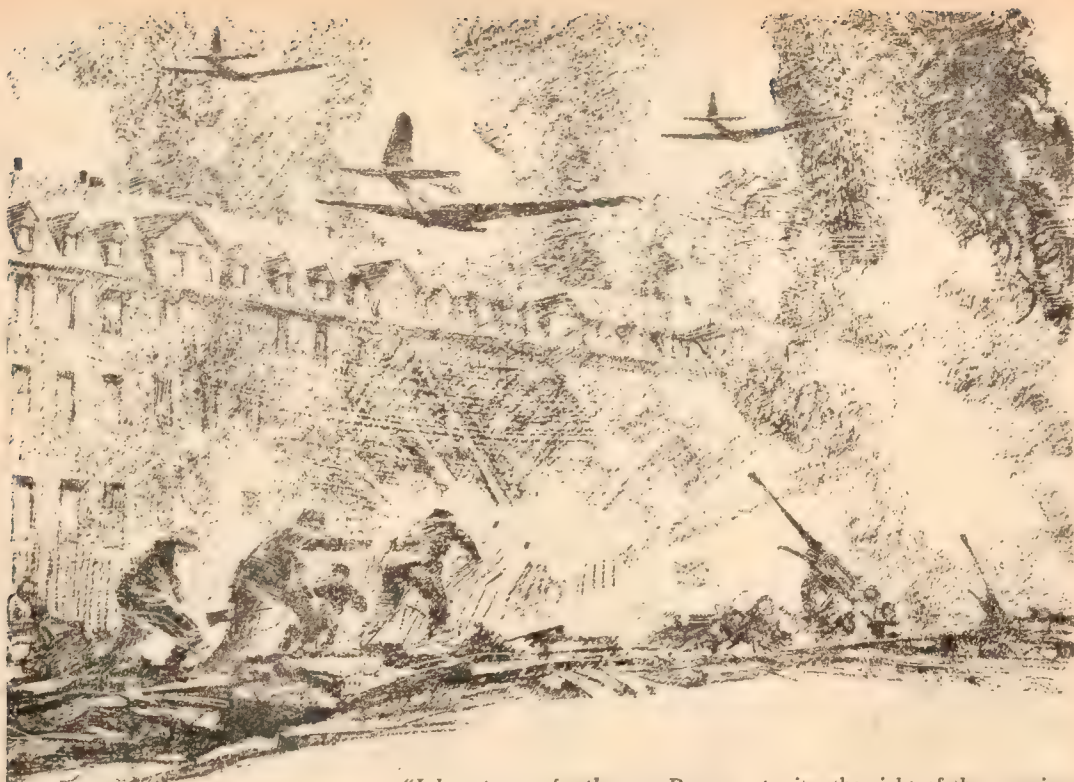
marked: "But now to business! I will ask you no questions about your division, your regiment, your battalion, nor even your company. Our real foe, as I have said, is Russia. One day she will be yours. To be frank, we wish some estimate of how many men we need to withdraw from the action against her in the East to hold you Americans in the West. You can help us in our fight against the common enemy by answering some questions regarding your supply lines. Troop movements will not be mentioned. No record will be made of this conversation. Will you cooperate?"

"No," said John Burgess, throwing back his shoulders.

Von Krug called the guards, ordering them to bring in Private Harney and Technical Sergeant Poulson.

Poulson, pushed toward the inquisitor's desk, was careful not to look at Lieut. Burgess. Harney, on the other hand, threw him a wide, expansive Irish smile. John could not repress his grim-faced delight in seeing his "doughs" again, still safe.

"You get on well with your men," Von Krug murmured softly. He took from the drawer a German Luger, which he placed on top of the desk within easy reach of his right hand. Motioning Harney to step nearer, he addressed him directly: "The jeep you were riding in had little petrol. How about the tanks this side of Köln?" When there was no reply, he picked up the pistol and fingered it carelessly. Suddenly it discharged into Harney's right thigh. "You see, Herr Professor, when prisoners do not talk



it makes me nervous. Or maybe you do not see. Will you answer for him?" John shook his head. Again the gun exploded. Harney moved his hands from his leg to his belly, then looked up at Von Krug almost wonderingly. A bullet crashed into his skull. He fell backward soundlessly, like a man in a tumbling act.

Before the guards had carried out their dead comrade, Poulson, who now was ordered to step closer, turned to his lieutenant and asked simply: "Will it make any real difference, if I answer his question, sir?"

John Burgess faced with the hardest decision of his life, nodded.

Poulson looked down the barrel of the Luger. "Then let's have it, you little slicked-up sonofabitchin' Kraut! Maybe it'll show you that Americans—" The slug through his heart slapped him back forever into silence. The giant S.S. men removed him too and returned, but Von Krug motioned them out again. Calmly he laid the gun on the desk and relaxed in his chair. "Have you a handkerchief?" he asked the American.

"I don't need it," said John hoarsely.

"I do not mean for the eyes, Dummkopf. Your men were so inconsiderate as to stain my floor. You may wipe up the blood, Herr Professor!"

Slowly Burgess bent his back. . . . Crouched in that position, he heard the scream of the plane before Von Krug did. As he glanced toward him, he saw those blue eyes, filled with Schadenfreude, roll momentarily upward. One lurch, and Burgess had the revolver in his own hand. In that instant, a bomb knocked him to the floor. He fought his way in dreamlike slow motion through dust and debris to the desk. Von Krug was gone. Outside, John Burgess witnessed a mad scramble of half-naked skeletons running one way, while their former captors, dressed in the soft exquisite uniforms that only a nation rich enough to wage war against the whole world could afford, fled in the opposite direction. Half-blinded with dust from the falling plaster, he ran after the Germans, wildly shooting the Luger until in his fury he tripped over barbed wire, fell heavily into a ditch, and lost consciousness.

DR. KELLER, imitating that part of the American press which had prepared the way, wound up his speech with a forthright blast against Russia, foe of liberty. Liberty meant freedom of speech, freedom of business oppor-

tunity, the right of the superior man to prove his ability as a leader. Modern Germany had had enough of regimentation. Could she swallow Russian regimentation? Could the world?

He sat down amid the most violent of applause. James Milhouser, president of the History Club, rose from his place beside the smiling speaker, and threw the meeting into an open forum. To start the ball rolling, he inquired what—in the Doctor's opinion—was the percentage of Germans who had embraced Hitler's teachings at the height of his popularity. Dr. Keller answered without any hesitation: "Approximately ten per cent."

Burgess was going from one camp to another. Hadn't anyone heard of Von Krug? Medium height, blue eyes, blond hair, well put together, lips a trifle thin. No, he wasn't just another German. Not by a long shot. Yes, Von Krug. And a Count at that. No, no other Kraut would do.

Professor John Burgess came out of it again. He listened with unbelieving ears to the laughter, the delighted approval that arose from the students as the beautiful blond adventurer from the Old World picked up their muddled questions, untangled them gently, and laid them back again in such perfect order.

There flashed across his mind the words written by a French journalist

five years ago, words he had never forgotten: "I have no illusion . . . wealthy Germans will get away with their secret deposits abroad; Prussian officers will assemble again; the workmen will toil to pay by installments and will hate the world for it. Economists will explain that the German economy should not be 'disrupted,' industrialists will feel a vague sense of solidarity with poor rich Germans who were unlucky with their investments, and people throughout the world will prefer to forget."

They must not forget! As for these kids around him, they must be made to know!

HIS mouth grew dry, as it always did if he spoke in public assembly. He tried to keep his voice from shaking when he broke in during a lull: "Dr. Keller, do you recall the oath of the German underground terrorists who called themselves Werewolves?"

"I think," answered Dr. Hans Keller readily, "that it is something like this: 'I will risk death daily and joyfully without regard to the childish rules of so-called decent bourgeoisie warfare.'"

"When did you join this movement?"

"I went into the German Anti-Nazi Underground Movement in 1941."

"Did you change your name?"

"Many times."

"When did you take the name of Dr. Hans Keller?"

Professor Burgess rose and started walking ominously toward the speaker's platform.

"My name is Hans Keller." There was just the faintest irritation across the doctor's face. His eyes followed John steadily as the young professor reached the raised platform, put out a hand, and vaulted lightly up. John stopped beside James Milhouser. Catlike, Dr. Keller rose. They stood about six feet apart.

"I thought," said John distinctly, "that maybe you had assumed that name for your American tour because it sounds so much like Helen Keller, whom we all love and admire. The last time I saw you, in the spring of '45, you wore the uniform of an S.S. man, and your name was Count Ernst von Krug. That must have been just before you joined the Werewolves. I looked for you in damn' near every camp in Germany, Von Krug, but I couldn't find you. I wanted to give you this!"

Count von Krug found himself looking into his own Luger. Keeping him covered, John spoke to young Milhouser. "Get down, Jimmy; this isn't any place for little boys who don't know how many Germans were back of Hitler when he was sweeping across Poland and France and Austria



and Czechoslovakia and Greece, and threatening to invade England, and to kick us around, as well."

When Milhouser hesitated, his history professor waved the Luger toward an empty seat in the front row. Milhouser wafted himself into it. John Burgess moved the speaker's chair to the edge of the platform, facing it out toward the audience. "Sit there, Von Krug," he ordered.

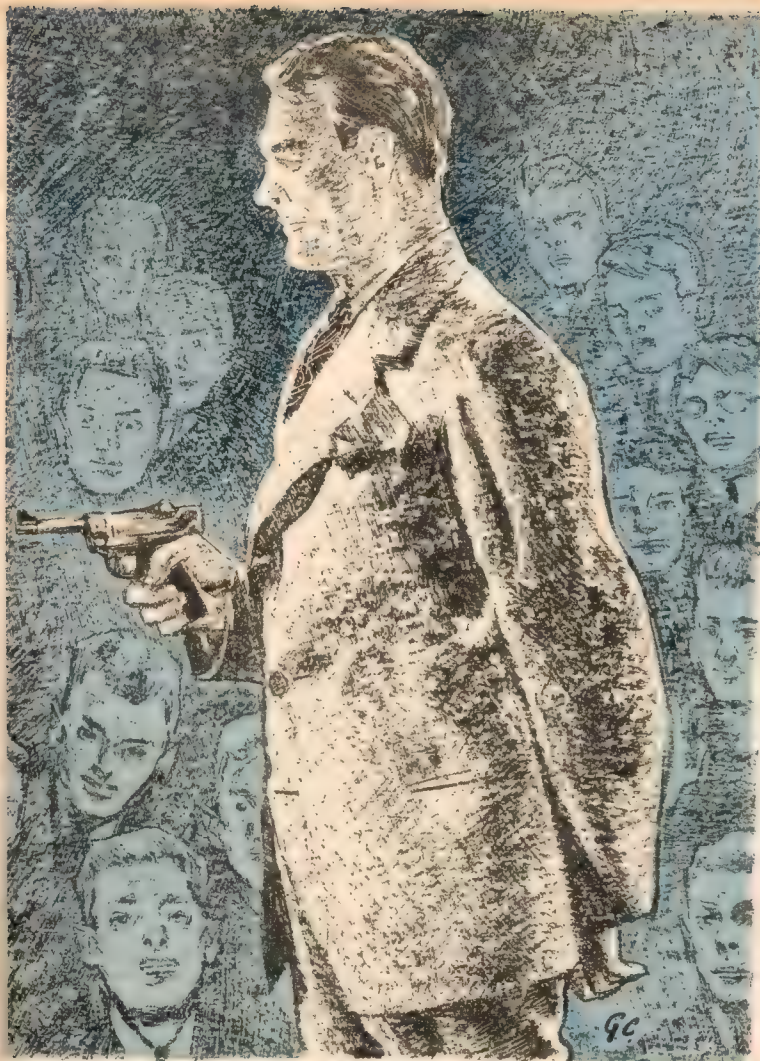
Instead, the Prussian appealed to the students swiftly: "Call the police, please; I demand protection from this maniac!"

While he was speaking, the professor moved up and slapped him hard with the flat of his hand. The whole side of that arrogant Prussian face, no longer placid, burned red. Only the Luger kept him unmoving.

"This is *my* country, you German filth! When we want the guards, I'll call them in. Sit down!"

John Burgess stood behind him, the Luger pressed against the back of his head. Solemnly he addressed the assembly: "Everybody else has been making speeches, so I reckon it's time I made one. You've been sitting there with your mouths wide open. It's time someone opened your eyes!"

"You might have been suspicious of this man when you found that he was touring the colleges trying to sell something. He is absolutely right when he says that there are good Germans and bad ones. Right now the good Germans are in Germany trying to build up the country these fellows tore down. But this German is as bad as a German can get, and that's



"I looked for you in every camp in Germany, Von Krug. . . . I wanted to give you this!"

month four strips of concrete would hide him forever.

"Dressed in his clothes, I could get on the train at Gainesville, change back to my own in his berth, walk through the coaches and get off with the crowd at Cromwell. There I would go to the house of Nace Costello, who was in my old outfit, and tell him the truth. He would drive me back to Gainesville to my car, parked two blocks from the station. So would Slim Johnson, who lives in Cromwell. So would any man who fought through Germany and saw the prison camps. We didn't have to dig up any of those old horror stories from the First World War. I didn't see any German soldiers barbecuing Belgian babies. They didn't leave enough meat on their bones for that."

He paused and announced solemnly: "I thought the mystery of his death might tip the hand of the underground organization that sent this man to America. But I can't kill him. I've been away from killing too long. And I don't want to get like him. We've got to show them we're really better than they are. So you will have to take over for me, not for lynching and the dishonorable death he deserves, but for justice under the law. You're a History Club. Let's see whether you're interested in European history or in American."

"He's your responsibility. It's up to you to bring this man to trial if you have to go to Washington and walk right into the Department of Justice and put him in their laps. I'm gambling that they can find a real good German somewhere who'll back up my case against this murderer."

"You can call the cops now. Give them this!"

He tossed the Luger out into the middle of the audience, where quick hands rose to seize it.

"THERE'S just one thing more,"

John Burgess started to say, but he never finished. Von Krug, who had remained stolid throughout John's speech, bounded sidewise from his chair and reached inside his coat, no longer the good Dr. Keller but a Nazi savage. The professor, who had a memory like an elephant, sprang forward to apply lesson C on how to attack an armed opponent, the way he'd learned it at Camp Lee. The gun and the German hit the hard oak platform in different places at about the same time. Instantly academic, soft-spoken John Burgess was astride the intruder, pounding his face as the crowd surged over the platform to see that American justice be done.

so evil it brings out all the worst in people who have to deal with their wickedness. The reason he could describe Nazi horror in such detail is that he was talking about himself.

"You've got a nerve crawling out of the woodwork, Von Krug. Don't you know that no matter what these kids think, there will always be enough like me who saw you over there doing your stuff? Or did you think I had been killed by that bomb blast?"

Without waiting for an answer he addressed the students again. Slowly and logically he related the facts about Von Krug. When he had finished, his face was as grave as an executioner's.

"I came here tonight to kill this man with the same gun he used on

Harney and Poulson. I arranged with my department to let me drive him over to Gainesville after this meeting to catch the midnight express. I was going to take the old road out through the golf-course and shoot him—in the thigh, the belly, the heart, and the brain!"

A gasp arose from the audience. But Burgess did not falter.

"Some of you will be familiar," he went on, "with the new State highway which just misses the third tee. My intention was to knock out Von Krug and strip him before he came to, read sentence, and execute him as I have described. I would then carry his body to the new highway, bury it in the fresh dirt of the new roadbed. Tomorrow the steam shovels and tractors would bury him deeper yet. Next

Murder



SATURDAY night on the Panama Isthmus—steamer night. Cruise passengers were pouring ashore here at Colón, and—for it was pleasant to listen to the home accents of Brooklyn, Chicago and points west—the Strangers' Club was playing host to them. So a gay crowd filled the place. There was a popping of corks and clinking of glasses; there was laughter; there was, of course, the rhythm of the rumba.

Dolorous it was, yet with a phantasm of sensuous abandon twined in it. Honeyed it was, yet with a gall-bitter aftertaste.

It reminded you of palm-trees standing tall and black against the tall black night; it reminded you of the shiver of a perfumed lace mantilla, of a hidden patio where a fountain tinkled beneath the sun—and a dagger might glisten beneath the moon. It reminded you, thought

Was His Meat

Michael Shea, of the days when you were under twenty-two and could never be over twenty-three; reminded you of all the women you had ever kissed—and all those you had wanted to kiss but hadn't. . . .

"So romantic!" whispered the little Milwaukee redhead—he didn't know her name—and snuggled more closely into his arms.

He did not reply; he continued to dance with a mechanical expertness. The *maraccas* rattled; the small drum droned; the guitar sobbed. Feet slurred—and he looked down at her, at the soft young curve of her cheeks,

the sweet parting of her hair, her mouth scarlet as a pomegranate.

Scarlet with lipstick, he decided morosely. Painted; as romance—the romance of the tropics—was painted, phony. . . .

"I envy you!" She talked in breathless italics. "Why, you actually *live* here! Oh,"—ecstatically,—"*it's so out-of-this-world romantic!*"

Michael Shea smiled thinly.

Romantic (was his unromantic thought) in a pig's eye! Sordid, his life and occupation: Investigator, on the Isthmus, for the Narcotic Branch of the Treasury Department. A

scrubby, grubby job; catching mean nasty drab little men sinning their mean nasty drab little sins. Why, if it weren't for the fact that occasionally, and unofficially, his friend Carlos Delgado, chief of the Panama police, asked his help and used his deep understanding of human nature, his pouncing intelligence and his queer, encyclopedic knowledge of many heterogeneous things— Especially in murder cases. Murder, he reflected sardonically, was his meat. Murder—the big sin, the crimson sin—and the psychological quirks that caused it. . . . "So romantic!" the girl repeated.

Heavens! Didn't she have a second string to her bow?

He yawned, changed his yawn into a cough; then he heard a short shrill whistle, looked up and saw Carlos Delgado on the threshold of the ballroom. The latter motioned to him—in the Spanish way, hand upside down, fingers curled—and he stopped in the middle of an intricate dance-step.

"Got to see a man about a dog," he announced bluntly and without originality; and walking away from the redhead, he joined his friend.

"What gives?" he inquired.

"Murder, Miguelito."

"Waterfront stuff, I suppose? A Barbadian carved up a *chombo* or the other way around?"

"No. Club stuff."

"Eh?"

"Right upstairs." Delgado's voice dropped. "Keep it quiet. Saturday night, you know! Mustn't frighten the tourists; mustn't smear blood on the nice tropical moon."

"But who—"

"Old man Woodring," said Delgado, and led the way to the top floor.

It was hours later.

The bulk of the large room lay in a dense cluster of shadows, while in the middle, above a square table, the light of a single electric bulb filtered through pleated yellow silk and centered on Michael's hands. They stirred a heap of smashed things. They groped, searched, seemed to consider before discarding the broken bits of pre-Spanish Indian antiques, Toltec and Aztec, Maya and Inca and Zapotec, pottery and obsidian and jadeite. Once a priceless collection; now it was worthless, ready for the ash-bin. . . . Michael's fingers moved among the wreckage with a harsh



There was blood on the tropic moon when an American detective took on the strange affair that revolved around the Talamanca vase.

by ACHMED ABDULLAH

Illustrated by Raymond Sisley



He had found his master dead and after frantically reporting it, had notified the police.

tinkle of clay against stone, until suddenly they picked up the one unbroken thing among the chaos, from where it had been half hidden by a fragment of rounded pottery.

It was a small globular vase with a spreading base, beautifully fired and glazed, cobalt-blue on peacock-blue, and painted with a delicate design of creamy-white flowers.

"Exquisite!" he said.

Almost reverently he handled the little vase, stared at it in silence, minute after minute, while Delgado frowned. The murder investigation, starting exuberantly with a plethora of clues, had feathered into mystifying, footling inconsistencies outrageous to

his Latin logic—which was as dry and prosy as a question in the rule-of-three. Only the fact of the crime, the fact of violent death, remained; it soothed his policeman's mind a trifle, but his friend's behavior annoyed him.

"You aren't very helpful," he said. "We've been here half the night, and you've hardly opened your mouth. Oh,"—impatiently, as Michael kept on intently regarding the vase,—"never mind squinting at that measly blue muck!"

Michael smiled.

"If," he said, "the old Talamanca artist who fashioned this two thousand years ago could hear you, he'd turn in his grave. It's a unique speci-

men, you know. Not even the British Museum—"

"Caramba!" interrupted the other. "Stop showing off! I grant," ironically, "that you do know everything about everything. I grant that you're an encyclopedia on legs. I grant, furthermore, that the vase (not that I give a damn!) is unique. But,"—pointing at a closed double door which cleft the coiling shadows with the ruddy warm glow of age-polished mahogany,—"what do you make of what's behind *that*?"

"Death is behind that."

"Tell me something new! What *about* this death?"

"I've observed one or two things."

"For instance?"—as impatiently as before.

"This!" With the nails of thumb and second finger Michael snapped the rim of the vase, causing it to ring in a soft, eerie way, like a tiny silver bell. "See what I mean?"

"I do not. What is it?"

"The sound. It's clear. It proves that the vase is unbroken, that there isn't even the slightest crack or fissure. And this sort of pottery is terribly brittle."

"What's that got to do with the murder of old man Woodring?"

"Are you sure he was murdered?"

"Aren't you?"

"Remember all those clues that led to nothing and—ah—to nobody?"

"Clues, hell! Can't get away from the fact of the thing, can you?"

DELGADO crossed to the farther wall, turned on the electric switch so that the full glare of the chandeliers danced into every nook and corner of the room. The place looked as if a cyclone had struck it. Once the whole of two sides had been lined by great glass cabinets, as in a museum. Now they were upset, their precious contents—more Indian antiques—covering the floor in thousands of splinters. The smashed collection on the table was merely a negligible tithe compared to the havoc wrought in the rest of the room.

Michael had seen it before—had seen too, with his automatically registering eyes, that a round console at the third wall had not been touched. On this console the silver-framed painting of a pompous man in a Civil War uniform was flanked by a lot of early American bric-a-brac, over-ornate, twisted and ugly. And, thought Michael, a twisted, ugly and deliberate act *not* to destroy them when all these ancient, glorious Indian things had been destroyed! A meanly foreseen neglect! Did it typify something morbid? Or perhaps the opposite?

"Don't you see?" Delgado's words cut into Michael's brooding reflections. "The place simply reeks of

murderous brutality. Some fight, old man Woodring must have put up!"

"Chiefly considering," drawled the other, "that he has been a helpless paralytic for years, tied to his wheel-chair."

Delgado shrugged his shoulders. He quoted what Dr. García, the police surgeon, had said at the preliminary inquest:

"In a moment of extraordinary excitement a paralytic can regain his physical powers. It is an axiom of medical science."

"Doctors," was Michael's comment, "have a scientific explanation for everything when they wish to prove it—or when they're too lazy or too dumb to look for—"

"What?"

"An unscientific and, by the same token, rational explanation!"

"Maybe. But science or no science, Woodring is dead, murdered. There's the ugly truth for you."

"There are certain other truths, uglier than murder and more complex."

"Such as—"

"Consider this vase, Carlos. Unbroken! Consider the bric-a-brac over there, also unbroken—"

"Consider—*¡válgame Dios!*—the dead man himself! Woodring has been murdered!" Delgado flung wide the open door. "Look again and convince yourself!"

The light from the chandeliers stabbed across the threshold, sharply outlining the lifeless form of a man, huddled in the padded leather depths of a wheel-chair. The figure was immense, flabby, obese. The mouth was forced partly open through a gag made of a piece of wood. But even in death, and though bloated as if by strangulation, the features had a certain greatness, a certain massive cruel beauty, a capacity of surrendering completely to the gods of stark pagan resolution, the gods of success—be it the accumulation of money and power, or the ambition to possess the first collection of Indian antiques in the world.

Michael recalled what he knew about Thomas Woodring.

Woodring had been a Vermont Yankee whose name had been for decades a by-word up and down the Spanish Main. He had been a survival of that picaresque era when traffic and barter in the far lands was still a clanking epic, a swaggering, two-fisted adventure; when brown men and gold still disputed the eternal Carib trade-balance with white men and blood; when, beneath the Southern Cross, a merchant prince was still a swashbuckler upon the gray waters and the blue hills, and not a pot-bellied, dollar-coining automaton safely ensconced behind a large desk with

seven telephones, an array of steel filing-cabinets and an army of polite and super-efficient and faintly servile private secretaries.

He had made millions; then, after suffering a paralytic stroke, he had come to Colón, where for the past few years he had occupied this apartment on the top floor of the Strangers' Club.

There, alone but for Alfredo Chavez, his Indian servant, he had lived the life of an eccentric recluse. He had grudged each penny expended on the necessities of existence, using all his income and dipping into his capital to buy Indian antiques; seldom receiving visitors; spending most of his time in wheeling himself about in his chair and examining and rearranging his collection with his trembling, palsied hands. Nor had he ever allowed anybody except Alfredo to enter the front room which housed his treasures.

He had become an accepted part of the Panama legend. People had smiled tolerantly at his peculiarities; they had, indeed, been rather proud of him. Such a picturesque figure—so they regarded him—and they had boasted about him to tourists.

BUT twice during the preceding month, he had irritated public opinion. Once, when Sir Angus McGregor, heralded as a famous expert, had come over from Glasgow solely to look at a fine carved *jicara* which had been one of Woodring's most prized possessions, and had been refused admittance. The other time, when the same experience had happened to Professor Juan d'Andrade—who had traveled all the way from Spain to examine a certain *metate*, a miniature stone tablet, so that he might put the finishing touch on a chapter of the book on ancient Nicoya art which was said to be his life-work.

The local press had played up the two men who had been ideal "copy." Sir Angus—speaking with a thick burr and clad, unseasonably and unreasonably, in heavy tweeds—had been as typically Scottish as a dish of haggis, while the other—quite as unseasonable and unreasonable with his stiff-brimmed, black hat and sweeping, scarlet-lined cloak—had represented the Spanish don of romantic fiction. Both men had been outspoken about Woodring's churlish behavior, and the papers had taken up the hue-and-cry.

In reply Woodring had written to the editors that he had the right to do as he pleased with his collection; furthermore, he wanted it known that he had installed an intricate system of protection guaranteed to electrocute any rash person who might try to enter his apartment by force or

stealth, and that Alfredo was armed ready to shoot any intruder on sight.

"And," said Delgado, "you know the queer thing about the burglar alarm—"

"I do. And I know too that Alfredo's own alibi is bullet-proof."

For Woodring had given his servant the preceding day off. The Indian had accounted for every minute of his absence. He had returned at eight in the evening, had found his master dead, and after frantically dashing downstairs and reporting it, he had notified the police. The inquest had demonstrated that Woodring had died at least three hours earlier.

"Murdered!" had been the verdict of the detectives who thereafter had found themselves in a maze of clues leading nowhere.

"Murdered!" exclaimed Delgado now. He pointed at the tragic figure. "Tied, arms and legs, to his chair! Gagged—and strangled!"

"Of course he was strangled," admitted Michael. "But tell me, was he strangled by the hand of man or—"

"What other hand can there be?"

"The hand of Fate."

"Eh?"

"Fate! And a chilly hand it is—a merciless hand. It does certain things, for a purpose. It leaves other things undone, also for a purpose, deliberately. For instance, this vase—"

"*Caramba!* There you go again! What is the matter with this vase?"

"It is Exhibit A." Michael went back to the square table, searched among the chaos, picked up a fragment of a massive copper urn. "And this is Exhibit B. And the bric-a-brac and the framed picture over there combine to make Exhibit C. With which, gentlemen of the jury, I rest the case." He paused, laughed harshly, added: "For the defense!"

"I"—stammered the other—"I heard you correctly?"

"You did. All that remains to be done is to locate the man who turned the trick—and ask him why he did it. There must be a reason,"—Michael spoke as if to himself,—"*there always is.* The vase—well—that might have been one of those fantastic accidents. But the piece of copper—and that horrible bric-a-brac—"

"Miguelito!" For a few moments Delgado had been speechless. Now excited words were frothing to his lips. "Did you say you have it all fixed—for the defense?"

"Yes."

"And all that remains to be done is to—"

"To catch the man who did it."

"You are mad!" exploded Delgado. "Absolutely mad! Here is a man tied, gagged, strangled. Here are things smashed to bits, proving what a fight it has been. Why, if ever there

was one sweet little murder with all the stage directions in first-rate order—

"That's just it. Stage directions. Theatrical. Too damned theatrical! You can almost smell greaspaint."

"One sweet little murder," the other repeated, unheeding. "And what do you do? You talk a lot of rot about all that remains to be done being to catch your bird. Oh, yes,"—as Michael tried to interrupt—"you did so!" He sighed. "And my best Headquarters detectives—Ramirez and Castillo and Aguirre—what do they find out?"

"Too much for too little," came Michael's rejoinder to the rhetorical question. "I listened in on the other phone, part of the time when they called you up here and"—he smiled—"reported progress."

"Progress!" Delgado's grunt was a study in bleak despair.

For, after the servant's alibi had been established, the detectives, proceeding on routine lines with the investigation, had found a number of clues, without a single link connecting them, and with certain twists that caused truisms, each separately rational, to pyramid into an immense and fabulous impossibility.

Here, for instance, was every sign of a tremendous fight winding up in death, evidently by murder or homicide. But in absurd contradiction to this was the testimony of other residents of the top floor who declared that no sound had come, during the afternoon and evening, from the Woodring apartment—with one single exception which, again a clue, again led nowhere.

For Woodring's next-door neighbor, a retired Army officer, had heard—earlier in the evening—something like a continued tinkle of the telephone bell, as if somebody had tried to call up Woodring without getting an answer. But Central, asked to trace the calls of the evening, had made the astounding declaration that for three weeks Woodring's telephone had been discontinued for non-payment of a four-month-old bill. However, the police calls were put through promptly, upon Delgado's order.

Then there was the clue that Woodring had been tied hand and foot and gagged; presumably after he had been subdued in that uncanny noiseless fight, and after he had so miraculously regained his bodily control. And this clue was wiped out by the fact that there was neither scratch nor bruise on the dead man's face or hands, and that his clothes were in perfect order.

Nor could anybody, club servant or resident or guest, remember a stranger's coming to the top floor.

This, in itself, meant little. The Strangers' Club being crowded with tourists, a man might have slipped

upstairs unnoticed. The how and when, Michael decided, made no difference. The unknown man had got in somehow and got out somehow. That was all there was to it. And it had not bothered Michael that the murderous electric appliances with which the treasure room was supposed to be protected had evaporated into thin air. There was not even a burglar-alarm; indeed, the room had been entirely unguarded.

Michael spoke of it now to Delgado, who a few moments earlier had opened the outer door in answer to a ring and had received a low-voiced report from Felipe Urazu, one of his detectives. Michael told his friend that it was really quite intelligible, considering the sort of man Woodring had been.

"A monomaniac—since you so love scientific terms, Carlos! A miser in everything except where his collection was concerned. But he was once a great business-man, familiar with the rules and twists and scoring values of the financial game called Bluff. So, through the newspapers, he warned all Panama about the murderous devices guarding his antiques. He figured that a three-cent stamp spent on a letter would be fully as effective as thousands of dollars paid to an electric concern, taken in conjunction with the—how shall I put it?—the almost-nonexistence of those two men, Sir Angus M'Gregor and Don Juan d'Andrade."

"You"—the other gave a start—"you know that they—"

"I've an idea. Anyway, taken in conjunction with those two—ah—half-real figures, it proves that Woodring had a tremendous and rather blighting sense of humor." He paused. "Evidently a family trait."

MOMENTARILY he was silent, communing with his brain—a strange and quirky brain. For (and thereby he outraged Delgado's Latin—and thus uncompromisingly logical—mind) he usually proceeded in his investigations by a method which the other called slipshod, which he himself pronounced to be applied psychology, and which might with equal truth be called applied poetry. This method centered about his claim that the best way to trace a criminal is not by what the latter has done, but by what he has deliberately left undone; that, in other words, a detective should reckon less with the unforeseen than with the foreseen. And Michael did so now, with that quick-pouncing intelligence of his which, too keen to be afraid of inconsistencies or loose ends or bold short-cuts, took recourse in guessing when there was no direct proof.

"A family trait," he repeated. "Shared by Woodring's brother."

"Had he a brother?"

"Must have had! Else why the unbroken bric-a-brac atrocities flanking the picture of the pompous gent in the Civil War uniform? A kind of shrine. Sloppily sentimental—yet, in a way, sardonic. Shows that the brother has Woodring's mental peculiarities, although"—again Michael guessed shamelessly—"they led him into a different channel—perhaps the channel of stifled religious fervor. So he won't be hard to find. Look for a religious fanatic, a scholar of ancient Indian culture, a man who has lived long years in Latin America and who—"

"Enough!" cried Delgado, and echoed angrily: "Religious fanatic—scholar of ancient Indian culture who has lived in Latin America! This—*por Dios*—is a murder case, not a burlesque show!"

"Wrong!" Michael's laughter was dry and staccato. "It is a burlesque—on death, ambition, and appreciation of beauty, and also on the solid if slightly musty virtues of an old New England family. A burlesque that has been overacted, overstaged—like the fantastic figures of Sir Angus and Don Juan."

"You mentioned them before," Delgado cut in. "Mentioned their—almost-nonexistence. What do you know about them?"

"What, doubtless, Uruzu told you when he reported here sometime ago. I suppose you had him investigate the Scot and the Spaniard?"

"Yes. I had my suspicions. I said to myself that maybe, with their having been so eager to examine some of Woodring's curios—and being furious at the collector—and with him dead, strangled—"

"You sent Uruzu on their trail, and he discovered that it led up a blind alley?"

"That's it. You're a bright lad, Miguelito! At least," Delgado conceded somewhat grudgingly, "you guess brightly."

"I don't always guess. At times I—" "Never mind." Delgado lit a cigar. "Uruzu," he went on, "had no trouble locating the hotels where they had stopped, each for only a couple of days—one at the Washington, the other at the Nacional. They arrived, had their set-to with Woodring, let off steam to the reporters, paid their bills and checked out. Where did they go? Uruzu kept on inquiring. Steamship offices—airplanes—railway across the Isthmus to the Pacific side—all the regulation stuff. But—"

"No dice?"

"Exactly. Never a smell did they leave behind! As if they had vanished into the upper ether." Delgado ashed his cigar. "Miguelito," he asked pleadingly, "how did you know those two birds had flown away with

never a trace? And what do you make of it?"

"Well," Michael said slowly, "they looked wrong to me."

"Oh! Crooks?"

"I'm not speaking of either their morals or their police records, if any. I'm speaking of— Look here, Carlos! A thing can be too good, too true to life. There can be too much local color in a play. And then a small detail gives the whole show away."

"Meaning?"

"Take Sir Angus, so amazingly Scottish, with his tweeds and his tartan necktie. I noticed that his tie was a tartan of Clan Campbell—though his name was M'Gregor. And take Don Juan, with his stiff-brimmed black hat and his flowing red-lined cloak. Well—the hat is a Madrid fashion, while the cloak is strictly in the Barcelona mode. Too much local color, I repeat; too much effort to appear genuine. And the small errors defeat the ultimate purpose."

DELGADO looked puzzled.

"What's the answer? Who were they—and why?"

"There was, perhaps, only one man. An actor out of a job, glad to earn the forty or fifty dollars Woodring paid him."

"What had Woodring to do with it?"

"Everything. He needed the actor—supposing it were one—for his preliminary publicity, leading up to his refusal to show his collection, and then to his letters to the press in which he gave warning of the murderous devices protecting his treasures. Don't you see, Carlos? He was a monomaniac, and a miser, and a very shrewd man. He staged the whole thing, with his blighting sense of humor. It is a family trait—perhaps a family madness. You know, some of those inbred old New England families have an occasional screw loose. Look at him!" Michael's hand pointed at the dead man who seemed to be watching the scene through glassy, sneering eyes. "Look at him sitting there, facing the ruin of the rare, glorious things that were the core and reason of his whole life! Hands and feet tied so that he cannot move, cannot wheel his chair forward to the rescue—mouth gagged so that he cannot cry out in protest! That, too, was staged, for an ugly, twisted, complex effect. Staged—by his brother!"

There was a knock at the door.

"Come in!" called Delgado.

A man entered. He was tall and emaciated. His face was marred rather than helped by the relics of a boisterous, vinous beauty that was in harsh, almost indecorous contrast to his black clerical garb and the great silver cross on his breast.



"Caramba! What is the matter with this vase?" asked Carlos.



He turned, walked past the dumfounded Delgado, and was halfway across the outer threshold when Michael stopped him with a question: "Would you do me a favor, sir?"

"Well?"

"I'd like to know if you've spent much time in Central and South America, in out-of-the-way places, among Indian tribes?"

"Yes. For many years I was my brother's partner. We were traders. Now I save souls for the Lord." He said it in a hard, businesslike man-

*"I had it in my hand.
But I—I couldn't,"
the man said to Michael.*

He bowed slightly.

"I," he began, "am—"

"The other Mr. Woodring, aren't you?" demanded Michael.

The man inclined his head.

"I have just heard," he said, "that my brother has died. So I have come to pray for him. For he died in sin." Suddenly his voice rose, with an intolerant note of hectic, inhuman austerity. "He died in sin," he repeated, "stricken down by the hand of Jehovah, the God of Wrath! He died in sin, as he lived in sin. I too have been a sinner. But the Lord spoke to me; I listened and repented. I saved my soul from the burning—and I saved the souls of many others, for the Lord is in my mouth—and I tried to save my brother's soul. I wrestled with this haughty, wicked spirit as the Great Angel wrestled with the flaming spirit of Lucifer. But—"

He interrupted himself. He went into the next room. There he dropped on his knees by the side of the wheel-chair and prayed at length, in silence.

Then he rose. He looked down at his brother's lifeless figure.

"Perhaps," he said, "the Lord will have mercy on you, Thomas. Perhaps the humbling of your spirit, when you saw the unclean pride of your flesh smashed to pieces before you, will be an atonement in the eyes of the Lord."

ner, as he might say that he was selling improved lots for a reputable real-estate firm. His faith seemed less a fanatic enthusiasm than a fanatic fact.

"And," Michael went on, "am I right in assuming that, like your brother, you took a great interest in ancient Indian art objects—in their religious art objects, I might say, since most of them went to decorate the altars in their temples?"

"That is so," admitted the other. "I too collected—admired—almost worshipped the things that—" He gave a shudder. "Ah!" A choked exclamation rose to his lips. "I," he went on dully, "I have struggled against it, and am still struggling. It is my weakness—the love of these heathenish, damnable things! It is"—he paused; it was as if he were stripping his soul naked and revealing its crimson shame for all the world to see—"my greatest failing, my blackest sin!"

Michael smiled without mirth. "Is that the reason," he asked—and his hand aimed, like a pistol, at the exquisite Talamanca vase where he had put it back amid the wreckage on the square table—"why you—"

"Yes! Yes!" The man approached the table. "Everything I smashed before my brother's eyes, slowly, carefully, making as little noise as possible, so that nobody might hear and interfere after I had tied and gagged him."

He stared down at the vase. "Everything I smashed," he mumbled, "dust to dust—soulless, heathenish things—to purge his proud flesh! Everything, everything—when, before I tied and gagged him, he replied with foul blasphemy to the words of the Lord which I brought to him." His eyes gleamed fanatically.

"Not everything," rejoined Michael. "There is this vase, you know."

"Yes. It was a weakness on my part—a craven; accursed weakness! A sin." His voice peaked a shrill octave. "I had it in my hand. But I—I couldn't. It is—"

"Unique," Michael purred gently. "An absolutely unique specimen. Not even the British Museum—"

"I could not break it. And my brother knew I couldn't. He stared at me mockingly, tried to laugh at me, through his gag, when he saw that I could not break it, as"—suddenly his fingers swooped down, and the action followed the words—"as I break it now!"

THE Talamanca vase dropped on the floor with a sharp crackle of splintering clay, and quickly the living Woodring walked out of the room, while something—a light, an expression, an eerie mixture of grief and ironic amusement—seemed to pass, like a shadow, over the stark features of the dead Woodring.

Michael looked at his friend. "It must have been," he said, "that laugh of Thomas Woodring's—when I saw his brother's weakness so closely akin to his own monomania, when he saw that the other could not break the vase—it must have been that laugh, choked by the gag, causing the blood to rush to his brain, which really killed him. It gave him that final stroke of paralysis which Dr. Garcia called strangulation. The symptoms, you know, are very much alike. So there you have it: death by the merciless hand of Fate—directed, though unthinkingly, by a fanatic's diseased brain. Yet I doubt that you've a case against him."

Delgado nodded slowly. "So do I—if you're right." "I am right. And it wasn't entirely guesswork. You see, there was all this violent destruction. But there

couldn't have been a fight, or it would have been heard. On the other hand, the Army officer next door mentioned the insistent tinkle of the telephone. I concluded that somebody had smashed the collection, slowly, carefully, and as silently as possible. But naturally there was a little noise—a faint tinkling of splintered pottery. Besides, I observed other details: Some were deliberate, foreseen, and some unforeseen."

"Such as—"

"The Talamanca vase. So brittle, yet perfect, unbroken. Deliberately unbroken—it proved that the man who had not broken it knew how unique it was, how precious; he must have been familiar with ancient Indian art, must have lived long years in South America. Yet"—Michael picked up the fragment of copper urn—"look at this! Heavy metal! Couldn't have been broken through accident. It demanded, to break it, a tremendous and lengthy effort, a steady brutal force and will. Perhaps ten minutes, fifteen, twenty. God! Can't you see that maniac gripping it, twisting it—and the other maniac watching, helpless, his eyes popping out of his head, his paralyzed body writhing and shivering, the gag choking his blasphemous rage?"

"Yes, yes!"

Delgado crossed himself, while Michael continued:

"And then the final clue. I noticed that the bric-a-brac on the console had not been touched. Terrible things, from a collector's viewpoint! Their only worth is—oh—traditional, sentimental and—" He pointed. "See that picture, Carlos? The portrait of the man in the Civil War uniform?"

"What about it?"

"Take a good look at it. And then take another good look at the body of Thomas Woodring."

DELGADO stared. "There is," he replied, "a likeness."

"A strong likeness! Father and son, eh? And those things on the console must have belonged to the father, and the son kept them for, I repeat, sentimental reasons. I said to myself that the man who, deliberately, did not destroy them must have felt the same sentimental scruples; he must have been a close relation—a brother—"

There was a silence. Then Michael said:

"I wonder which one of the two brothers—the dead one or the live one—is the greater sinner."

"I wonder!" echoed Carlos Delgado.

Old Man River

A Quiz by Charles Francis Drake

TWENTY-FIVE rivers
Rushing to the sea,
If you can name twenty
You have the goods on me.

Four points for each river,
Of those you have no doubt,
Seventy, drifting; eighty, roaring;
Ninety, flood and washout!

- | | Description |
|-----|-------------------------------|
| 1. | A famous traveler |
| 2. | "Big eats" down South |
| 3. | Wearing down Grand Cañon |
| 4. | Called "The Gem of the Ocean" |
| 5. | Where lame water flows |
| 6. | Washington crossed to victory |
| 7. | Found by the <i>Half Moon</i> |
| 8. | Winds near noted Starved Rock |
| 9. | Comes after bold Jesse |
| 10. | Scene of Custer's last stand |
| 11. | Old Woman River |
| 12. | "Show me, I'm from—" |
| 13. | Not Tommy, but Mo |
| 14. | Two zeros and high |
| 15. | Add "Q," and hurry up |

16. Shallow, like a plate
17. Very Grande, indeed
18. Flows by the "Lost Colony"
19. Gold Rush centered here
20. Don't tread on me
21. Old Folks at Home
22. With some "Authority"
23. A cat and a bumblebee
24. "The Moon is Fair Tonight Along"
25. Dashing over colored rocks

- Answers
- | | |
|-----|-----------------|
| 1. | Arkansas |
| 2. | Chickahominy |
| 3. | Colorado |
| 4. | Columbia |
| 5. | Cripple Creek |
| 6. | Delaware |
| 7. | Hudson |
| 8. | Illinois |
| 9. | James |
| 10. | Little Big Horn |
| 11. | Mississippi |
| 12. | Missouri |
| 13. | Yellowstone |
| 14. | Ohio |
| 15. | Peedee |
| 16. | Platte |
| 17. | Rio Grande |
| 18. | Roanoke |
| 19. | Sacramento |
| 20. | Sauwage |
| 21. | Snake |
| 22. | Swanance |
| 23. | Tennessee |
| 24. | Tombigbee |
| 25. | Wabash |

MISSION to MANCHURIA

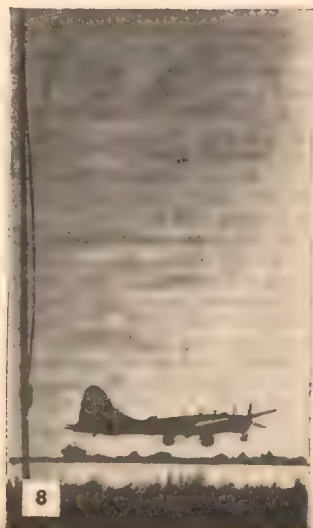
A soldier artist follows a Superfortress in the attack on the Showa Steel Works—the most important target in Manchuria.

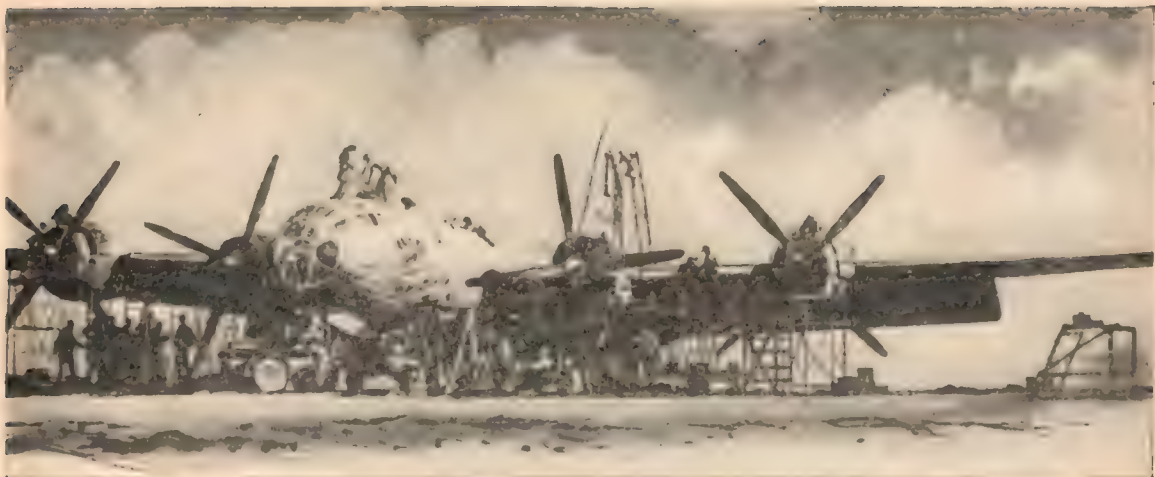
by Stanley Zuckerberg

Maintenance of the Hellbird Superfortresses, shown at the right, which is a continuous twenty-four-hours-a-day process, is the back upon which the success of the bombing mission rests. Under the blistering Indian sun, covered with grease, the maintenance men climb over the ships for long hours working inside the huge engine nacelles, trouble-shooting and repairing.

(2) On D-Day minus two, an L-5 AAF (Piper Cub) one of the smallest planes in the world, set in motion the machinery that moves the largest bombers in the world into action by the delivery of the Twentieth Bomber Command Field Order Number Eight.

(3) A staff meeting is called in the office of the Hellbird Group Commander, to discuss the F.O., the strategic importance of the target, the opposition that may be encountered and operational procedures.





(4) Intelligence personnel prepare target information based on intelligence gleaned from aerial photographs and other sources for the briefing of the crews.

(5) Five-hundred and one-thousand-pound general purpose and incendiary bombs are lifted gently into the gaping bomb-bays.

(6) After a night's sleep, the men report for weather briefing on the "hump" flight, just before dawn. The target is still undisclosed.

(7) At dawn on D-Day minus one, the crew-members, gunners, pilot and co-pilot, flight engineer, navigator and radio operator and observer, all pitch into the job of turning over the sixteen-foot props.

(8) As the sun rises, the first of the heavily loaded Superfortresses lifts slowly off the ground.

(9) Flying over the Himalayas,



higher than any other mountains in the world, with sharp jagged peaks below, the men sweat out the treacherous "hump" flight.

(10) They make successful landings on the mile-long runway lying in a hidden valley in the Chengtu area northwest of Chungking.

(11) After a short rest and Chinese-catered chow, the men report to the main briefing, where the target is disclosed and all necessary information presented to them.

(12) The planes receive another thorough going over by China-based maintenance crews, are gassed up and lined up for take-off.

(13) Amazing in daylight, the Superforts are fantastic at night as they take off, their powerful landing-lights probing the darkness under each wing.

(14) At dawn of D-Day after flying nearly all night the aircraft meet at the Assembly Point, wheel into their briefed formations, turn and head toward the target not far distant.



13



15

(15) Warned of our approach, "Tojo's" were the first fighters to give us any trouble.

(16) The trouble was all theirs, however. The Jap antiaircraft fire was meager and inaccurate.

(17) The sky was clear at "Bombs away!"

(18) The bombs fell in a preconceived pattern, designed to fit the shape of the target.

(19) The Showa Steel Works was blanketed with high explosives.

(20) Back at the Forward Base, the men who "keep 'em flying" "sweat out" the return of the planes and their landings, for the distance involved is up in the thousands of miles and even a Superfort can carry only so much gas.



18



19



20



(21) Trucks meet the incoming planes and speed crews to the Interrogation.

(22) "Hot News" first!! At the doorway of the Interrogation Building is the Hot News Desk. News that can't wait is reported here.

(23) The local Chinese army officers give the Hellbirds a celebration with coffee, cake, sandwiches, and fireworks.

(24) A sober note comes when the men begin to watch for an overdue ship.

(25) All crew members are then called to their specialist interrogations and the gunners make their claims of enemy aircraft destroyed, "probably destroyed," or damaged.

(26) After a night's sleep the men and aircraft fly back over the "hump" to their India Base, where the Photo Interpreter plots the bomb hits from the photos taken at the time.

(27) At the "critique" the following day, the men are given a complete report of the mission. Suggestions and criticism are asked for and contributed by all.

(28) And the maintenance continues, preparatory to another blow at the Japanese.

BLUE BOOK is glad to receive letters from you, our readers, telling us what you are thinking about—about your business, the war's effect on you or those dear to you, or any other subject likely to interest others as well as yourself.

We will pay twenty-five dollars for each letter bought by us. The author's full name and address must accompany the letters; but, if he prefers, initials only may be used for publication. No letters will be returned. All letters submitted will become the property of McCall Corporation. Address: "What Do You Think?" Blue Book Magazine, 230 Park Avenue, New York 17, N. Y.

What Do You Think?

A Readers' Forum

A Lady Answers

THE letter "A Good Woman" in **BLUE BOOK's** August issue is interesting, well put, well written and—sadly, too true. The subject is important. This day, as in no other, there is great need for good women.

But there are few born good women. Goodness is acquired. Acquisition depends on intelligence. Of all humanity, not many possess adult intelligence, and only one quarter of that number possess a super-consciousness which is the necessity in the "above-ruby" classification.

So you must seek a woman who is one in ten thousand, according to my research. She is valuable. What will you be willing to pay for her? She is a perpetual challenge. Can you stride along with her? She is heaven on earth. Will you believe in her?

And what do you think such a wonderful edifice of *she* cost to build? What made her valuable? Her care of her body, heart, mind. Can you gentle her out of her wariness? Can you give her repose? Can you let her be spontaneous? If you fail in these, she'll turn to church and a masculine god; she'll abhor the masculine in you. Here's your test, male! Prove to her how God lives in you; how you value your part in creation.

Why is she a challenge? Because her pride among her women friends keeps her belly in, her mind up, her bed clean, her family presentable. Do you belong to an active man's group? Can you catch the biggest fish? Why don't you pick up the challenge and work with her, not against her?

If a man can find a woman to believe in, all obscure truths cease to be devious, for life must be simple to women. They have much to accomplish between twenty and fifty. Their scope is limited by sex and convention. Are you afraid to give her benefit of your experiences? She can't adventure them out as you have. Can you teach her not to be afraid of pain?

Her world is small, her horizon near. Find with her how other peo-

ple have worked out their everyday mediocrities. There's nothing new under the sun. There's only birth, work, death. Getting along is work. It is difficult for two such different creatures as a man and woman to live together at all, much less continuously and for years, in any degree of peace, let alone with joy and a triumph over the commonplace. Adaptation and adjustment are two great and necessary privileges in human behavior. Bull-headed, selfish, stupid ignorance never senses that. A man cannot make an ignorant woman into a passionate, understanding wife. It is well to choose the intelligent girl in the beginning. But how many of you do? You may say you haven't seen any. Where do you look? No good woman is ever found in cheap places doing cheap things.

How do I know all this? Because I've lived it. You wouldn't pay for a good wife what my husband paid for me and is still paying in patience, attention, ambition, self-denial and self-elevation. Maybe you can't inspire the willingness to work with a man, to develop understanding for a man's world, to answer a man, that my husband has.

Just remember this, as Solomon said: "A good woman is above rubies." Rubies come high and there are few men who become them, and fewer still, who, upon seeking and finding them can keep them.

Do you still want a ruby?

H. P.

The Lifeless Plain

LAST night I told my buddies I was going to take a hike through the plain that surrounded our Army camp. We had just been in camp five days, having come up from Basic Training.

"That dead lifeless flat!" they scoffed at my proposed adventure. "If you find the bones of a rabbit out in that dry grass, you'll be lucky!"

I started on my hike just as the sun was setting and the terrible heat of a hundred-fifteen-degrees day lay heavy on the land. At first I waded through the rattling dead grasses, but as I drew near the small dry river-bed, I saw touches of green and the yellow flame of thistle flowers. Then on the swales the grass moved gracefully in waves as

two jackrabbits, their long ears low along their backs, raced for deeper shelter. Redwing blackbirds plaintively cried from a lone willow tree, and when I stepped down through the long shadows onto the stones of the river-bed, I found a delightful coolness that seemed to have been sucked down from the high hills. But it was in the little steep-sided gullies which ran across the plain that life grew richly, belying the dead appearance of the flats. Here deep shade kept out the sun, and in damp crevices moss spores lifted delicate brown heads.

Exploring up the river-bed, I studied the stories of bird and animal tracks in the smooth sand: pheasant and sandpiper, jackrabbit and fox, and the sinister curved imprint of a snake's scaled form. Going on, I found half-hidden pools deep beneath rock ledges where clear water had gathered in defiance of the fierce sun-rays. Here minnows darted, their gray-brown backs invisible when they were still; and water-boatmen drove on flailing insect legs down to the bottom sand.

When I had followed the river for a mile, I found a tree near its banks, a honey locust some forgotten settler had planted years ago. Now grown to full glory, the locust lifted its many rough-barked arms toward the sky until, looking up through it, I gazed at a complex infinity of leaves green and lovely against the bits of blue.

I stood very still there for a long time, drenched in beauty, till sparrow and blackbird wings fluttered confidently above my head, and a gopher lifted its blunt nose from its burrow to pull down a fat weed into the earth's darkness. The moon now rivaled the last soft light of the long-set sun; and in that deep warm peace of a summer evening, I heard a breeze rustle the leaves of the ancient tree till I was sure I heard God's voice whispering above me, though the words were too low and sad to hear.

When I came back by the Post Exchange and saw the men sitting as I had left them two hours before, drinking bottle after bottle of beer because they were so bored and had thought of nothing else to do, I understood why God's whisper had been sad. I wished I could take these men out to see and hear and feel the green rich vales of life in that "lifeless" plain.

Pvt. Duart Brown.

Salvage



PETE KERRIGAN had a careful look through his glasses at the sloop with the torn mainsail. She was a typical native craft of the Caribbean, old, unkempt, down-at-heel. The planking of topsides and deck was bleached gray by the fierce sun of the Virgins; what little paint remained on her was checked, curled and blistered.

Her long boom had dropped down on her cabin top with half the patched mainsail enveloping it and the after half of the boat. The other half of the gray sail, which had split from leech to luff, flogged wildly from the peak, like a flag of distress.

Two barefooted men forward, who had taken in the jib, now were waving frantically for help, making no further effort to help themselves.

"They sail 'em till the chain-plates are streaks of rust and the sails are like wet paper, an' then they get upset when the stick carries away or the canvas rips," Dave Bullen said. "Shiftless!" He looked complacently over his own ill-kept motorboat and listened with appreciation to the tortured clanking of her motor.

Pete Kerrigan's binoculars were good. They centered curiously on the

third man on the distressed sloop, who stood aft near the sail-covered wheel. His white shirt and pants were as ragged as those of the others, but they were surprisingly clean. This man did not wave. He waited.

Kerrigan glanced down at the chart. When first sighted, the sloop had been much closer to Dirk Island. And Pete Kerrigan was interested in any boat that had had connections with Dirk, that sun-blasted rock, waterless and uninhabited, lifting like a man's fist out of the merciless sea to leeward.

"Come around to windward of him," he said to Dave Bullen.

"That guy has a motor," Bullen said. He rubbed his fingers together covetously. "He don't get no tow out o' me—not without cash on the line."

"You're under charter to me," Pete Kerrigan said succinctly. "Close up on him."

Dave Bullen peered up at him with an intimidating scowl. "For a guy that's all gaga about the little birdies, you're sort of bossy," he said.

"Me?" said Pete Kerrigan, surprised. "Certainly not! Look! I'll do it myself."

His long fingers clamped abruptly around Dave Bullen's ribs. With a

sudden effort he lifted the thickset motorboat-owner six inches off the deck of the pilothouse and swung him aft, peeling his gripping fingers easily from the wheel by the thrust of the movement. He set him down gently and took over the helm.

Dave Bullen stood still. His broad face went glum as he carefully looked over his tall, willowy charter party with the red hair and the amiable smile that did not change.

"Okay! Okay—okay!" he said with disgust. He rubbed his ribs. "Gi' me the wheel."

Pete Kerrigan said nothing. He surrendered the wheel. Dave Bullen, with his thick, chunky shoulders hunched sulkily, maneuvered to windward of the sloop.

The man aft cupped his hands and hailed:

"Would you have the kindness to sell me five gallons of gas? I haven't enough to make the nearest port."

He removed his hands to smile compellingly, revealing large teeth startlingly white in his dark face.

Beside him one of his crew gestured pathetically with a can.

"He's a spig named Delgado—been hangin' around St. Thomas for two

Comes High

A novelette of post-war adventure in the Caribbean

by RICHARD HOWELLS WATKINS

months," Dave Bullen said under his breath.

"The answer is 'Yes,'" Pete Kerrigan said. "He has no small boat. We'll lay alongside him."

DAVE BULLEN stared at the choppy seas—moved his lips. Then his resentful eyes flicked once at his lean companion.

"Okay!" he roared suddenly to Delgado. "But it'll cost you money? Get out fenders!"

Skillfully he brought his boat alongside. Delgado's two-man crew—both white men of a sort—hung onto the motorboat's rail while the can was passed.

"You are perhaps headed for Dirk Island?" Delgado asked Dave Bullen swiftly. His luminous black eyes roved toward Pete Kerrigan—who was breaking out a full can from their own reserve carried aft in the cockpit under a tarp—and missing nothing.

"Yeah," said Bullen. He stuck his head out the wheelhouse window. Lingered resentment boiled into speech that carried downwind to Pete. "We're goin' there to band the birdies." He grinned sourly at Delgado's expression of polite, inquisitive incomprehension. "Yeah, Mr. Kerrigan, aft there, is—"

"Kerrigan?" Delgado interrupted.

Bullen nodded impatiently. "Kerrigan. He's going to fit nice aluminum bands all numbered on the legs o' the nestlings in the colony o' sooty terns there, so that when they turn up somewhere else, bird bugs can tell where they come from." His voice became falsetto mockery. "Aint that sweet? Aint that just—" His voice cut off abruptly as Pete Kerrigan, coming forward, looked at him with no favor.

"Science has its votaries," Pete said with stilted disapproval, "no less devoted than Mammon's."

"Ah!" said Delgado, nodding. His black eyes glowed with sympathetic

comprehension. He went on: "You will find on Dirk Island George Blaine and others, whom I landed three days ago."

Pete Kerrigan passed across the can, and paused to listen.

"Will you most kindly tell Captain Blaine of the disaster to my sail which may delay my return with supplies several days beyond the appointed time?"

Dave Bullen let his lower lip sag. "Blaine?" he put in. "Blaine's on Dirk? Why, Blaine was Mike Kerrigan's mate when the old bull sold out to the Gamecocks right there on that is—"

Pete Kerrigan had sauntered into the wheelhouse. His foot came down hard on the toes in Dave Bullen's slipper.

"All set, Skipper," he said brightly.

Dave Bullen winced. He swallowed the rest of his words unhatched, and Kerrigan strolled back to the cockpit again and glanced at Dirk Island.

"I thank you, gentlemen, and wish you success with the birds," Delgado said. "And I must insist on paying my debt."

He drew back and groped for an instant in his wallet, while Bullen's small eyes watched every movement. Bullen's hand was ready to reach across the gap and grasp the bills Delgado held out, folded small, in the palm of his hand.

Pete Kerrigan's survey of Dirk was not so intent that he did not see Bullen look at the bills, stare at Delgado incredulously and let his eyes slide hastily aft to Pete himself. Then, with great speed, Bullen shoved the money deep in his pocket.

"Okay!" he croaked swiftly. "Cast off! Let her go!"

He shoved in his gears and opened up his motor. His boat churned rapidly away from the sloop. Bullen craned his neck to look back.

Delgado was standing still by the rail of his uncomely craft. He lifted

a hand to Bullen in a courtly gesture of farewell, and his white teeth gleamed in a smile. Bullen flipped a hearty hand and turned forward. Only then did he find time to line up the bow on the gray lump that was Dirk Island.

Pete Kerrigan came into the wheelhouse out of the sun.

Bullen's small eyes slanted sideways. "Only one lousy buck for the gas," he grumbled. "A nice line of language that spig puts out."

Pete nodded. "Yes, I believe education is not confined to the United States," he said mildly.

BULLEN grunted. He was silent for two minutes. Then he spoke:

"So old Mike Kerrigan's son goes to Dirk Island to band birdies just when Mike Kerrigan's old mate happens to be there!" His eyes dug at the tall redhead. "Bird-banding be blasted! What's goin' on, Mister?"

Pete Kerrigan met Bullen's greedy little eyes.

"What do you think happened to Mike Kerrigan three years ago on Dirk?" he asked slowly.

"I know all about it," Bullen said.

"What?"

"Three years ago Mike cursed out shipyard men on St. Thomas for their estimate on hauling out his cargo schooner *Marie*. He sailed her to Dirk to careen an' paint her himself in Cup Bay, with his crew. But before he got started, hurricane warnings came through on the radio. He waited."

Pete nodded. His eyes were intent. "That night while the schooner lay in the bay with the wind tuning up, a seaplane made a forced landing on the island," Bullen went on. "It was any port in a storm for the guys in it. They were—Gamecocks."

He looked challengingly at silent Pete Kerrigan.

"Gamecocks, they called themselves," he said.



Bullen and Pete stood above the man on the sand. The wound that had killed him was in his back. A knife-thrust.

"It's a silly name."

"Yes, but as tough a little bunch of renegades an' crooks as ever got together in the Caribbean, which is sayin' plenty. Law-enforcement wasn't so hot in some countries an' islands, what with the war, revolutions, black-market deals, war profits an' so on. All nationalities but no countries, those guys. Mostly they laid low till a job came along that paid big. It had to pay big—that was the one stipulation. The job this bunch was on—four of them—was gettin' a U-boat commander back to a Nazi sub. Any objections?"

He waited, with his eyes on Dirk Island, ahead, and his hands hard on the wheel, but he couldn't make Pete speak.

"Well, I don't know's you could blame Mike Kerrigan too much," Bullen went on uneasily. "These four Gamecocks an' the Germans were stranded, but they had guns enough

to make mincemeat o' Mike Kerrigan, George Blaine an' eight black Virgin Islanders."

Pete Kerrigan was getting restive. His eyes were cold blue stones. "Go on!" he said.

"So Mike made a deal with them to sail the Nazi to the sub after the blow, brought 'em all aboard; an' George Blaine, not likin' the set-up, hid out on him ashore." Bullen rushed on nervously. "But before the night was over, the hurricane hit out o' the sou'west, piled up the schooner in the bay an' drowned Mike Kerrigan an' half his crew."

HE held up two fingers. "Two o' the Gamecocks lived through the wreck. They patched up the schooner's boat and got away a day before a Navy patrol put in to see how the schooner'd come through the gale. Prob'ly the sun got both o' them. When they found the boat adrift near

St. Matthew, the one guy left had stabbed himself. Blaine told the Navy what had happened on Dirk."

"In other words, the Navy had nothing to go on but the lies George Blaine told about his dead skipper," Pete Kerrigan said harshly. "And they're still going around the islands. Lies, Bullen! Tack up that word *lies* in your skull and we'll get along fine."

Bullen slanted his gaze again.

"Haven't you been over in the Pacific on an Army transport the last three years?" he asked.

Pete Kerrigan nodded. Under his reddish eyebrows his blue eyes brooded on Dirk Island.

"Then what do you know about it?" Bullen asked boldly.

"I knew the old man," Kerrigan said. "They called him 'Barracuda' and a lot of other names in these latitudes, but he never took a bite out of anybody that didn't ask for it. And he never teamed up with renegades

who were making nickels running errands for the wrong side."

He laughed harshly. "The Gamecocks!" he repeated contemptuously. "They'd be no more than frying-chickens to Mike Kerrigan."

"It wasn't nickels," Dave Bullen said. His voice had a hungry sound. "And your dad wasn't too tough to get himself kilt on Dirk, when his mate Blaine an' half his crew come through the blow alive."

Suddenly Bullen's voice rose. "Look! What're we goin' to Dirk for? What're we doin' there?"

"What's Blaine doing there?" Pete Kerrigan asked softly. He looked hard at the squat boat-owner. "Want to quit?"

Dave Bullen chewed his lips soundlessly. "Maybe not," he said slowly. "I never had more sense'n curiosity. No." His small eyes grew smaller. "But this ought to pay better'n birdie-bandin'. That's only fair!"

Pete Kerrigan nodded. "Twice as much," he said; "but you look after your own funeral expenses if necessary."

Sweat poured off Bullen's slanting forehead. "But why—" he persisted.

"Because a few months after the Germans quit, George Blaine began dickering with the bank handling Dad's affairs, for the right to salvage the schooner. The bank had to let it leak to me that the old man's been branded a traitor for three years. I got leave and came fast."

He took a turn across the wheelhouse as if it were a cage.

"I'm finding out why this Blaine denounced his dead skipper," he said. "I'm finding out what he's really up to on Dirk, now that these waters aren't full of Navy patrols."

He looked Dave Bullen steadily in his uneasy eyes.

"What really happened on Dirk hasn't come out yet, Bullen," he said.

CHAPTER TWO

IT was not until quick dusk came down that Dave Bullen's motorboat crept through the gap in the reef northeast of Dirk. Above, the abrupt sixty-foot cliff of volcanic rock towered like a mountain. With the wind gone dead, the darkening waters within the outlying jagged ledge slowly ceased to churn and crash on coral. Currents that had rushed through the breaks subsided to oily swirls with dark and secret errands among the rocks. Pete sniffed the hot air radiated by Dirk's cliff without pleasure. It had an odor of its own, like air out of an oven.

Dave Bullen, easing her in unwillingly, was split between rage at Pete Kerrigan and fear for his craft.

"You say this guy Blaine never saw you; you got bird-bandin' as an alibi," he muttered. "Yet you sneak in an' risk anchorin' in this unsheltered boneyard when there's a good anchorage around in Cup Bay."

But he knew he had lost the argument two hours ago.

On the foredeck Pete Kerrigan swung the lead and signaled for a turn to starboard. Dave Bullen moaned as he caught a glimpse of a quick swirl of water to port: A coral head, and not a foot of water over it.

A moment later Pete had a look around at the cliff close above. He gestured to Bullen to reverse the mumbly motor, made one more cast of the lead and then let go the anchor. The boat drifted sidewise—brought up as Kerrigan took a turn of the line on the bitt.

She lay shielded from sight of anyone ashore not standing directly on the bluff above.

Pete came aft into the wheelhouse. "We'll be out of here before the trade stirs things up in the morning," he reassured the sulky owner.

"Damn' right! An' what do we do now?"

"We wait for the moon."

Bullen snorted and went below to fry some fish.

The moon was long in coming. At last it lifted, a dull gibbous disk, out of the sea. The quarter in which it rose was that from which, in the morning, the tradewind would come and make this harbor of refuge a rock-filled caldron of uneasy water. Even now fretful ripples whispered threats against the motorboat's bulging sides.

Pete Kerrigan, out in the cockpit aft, watched the moon climb and gain luster in the sky; Dave, in the shadowed wheelhouse, watched Pete.

When the silver light was strong enough to reveal some detail of the rock-strewn shore, Pete stood up and motioned toward the clumsy rowboat moored astern. Bullen brought it alongside, slid his thick body overside onto the rowing thwart with clumsy agility, and held on while Pete Kerrigan stepped down into the sternsheets. Bullen rowed a few strokes, getting his direction toward a dimly seen landing-place from Pete's outstretched arm. The bow cracked on barnacles and ran up on a ledge. They stepped out, hauled up the boat and stood still, staring into the shallow water a few feet to the west.

Here the sheer wall of the windward coast had crumpled away to make a low boulder-strewn shelf. In the water below and extending up into the rock lay a few metal girders, the heavier remnants of the fuselage of a plane, picked clean by heavy seas.

Dave Bullen gasped. "They landed here—them Gamecocks—when they

could ha' tried it in Cup Bay!" he said. "Why would—"

"Perhaps, like us, they wanted privacy for a bit," Pete Kerrigan said. "The schooner *Marie* lay in the bay."

"They must ha' known they had guns enough to handle the crew of a tradin'-schooner."

"Yes," said Pete. He took up on the strap suspending the glasses around his neck. He felt the rough texture of his shoulder holster slung unobtrusively under his shirt. "They must have known that."

He turned to the left and began climbing up along the rim of rock fronting the east. Though it was far past midnight, the stone under his hand was still warm from that day's sun. The island's surface was like a saucer, tilted up sharply to make a high windward coast, hollowed out in the chaotic, rock-piled center and falling away on the west side. Behind him, on flat ledges stretching seaward, lay the rookery of the sooty terns.

"I'll not be disturbing them," he told himself with a twinge of premonition.

PETE had climbed some distance before he sighted the sea's break in the saucer's low sandy southwestward edge, the entrance to Cup Bay. It was still in darkness, all that western side, shadowed by the eastern cliff along which he advanced upward. Bullen's heavy breathing followed close behind him. Pete's course was below the topmost edge, to avoid silhouetting himself to any possible watcher along the shores of Cup Bay.

Dave Bullen cursed fretfully as he blundered into the spines of a prickly pear; cactus made up the larger part of the vegetation on this rock in the sea under the tropic sun.

After fifteen minutes of cautious clambering, Pete stopped. He had outpaced the moon; the bay below was still in darkness.

Bullen started back with a sudden yip as something went past him in erratic flight.

"Just a bat," Pete said. "There must be a cave on this island." He put his back to the rocky wall and stood there—staring into the black silent water below in which his father had lost his schooner, his reputation and his life while a hurricane wind roared across the island.

"Mike Kerrigan came through blows enough, without as much protection as that bay," he said, low-voiced, thoughtful. He brooded over the dark scene, as devoid of life as a lunar landscape. The only sound was the quiet breathing of the sea.

The moon, seeming to gain in altitude and brilliance more rapidly now, gradually drove the velvet shadow off Cup Bay. At first it revealed a sandy

spit forming one side of the entrance. Two tents, as silent as if painted there, had been pitched on the sand, away from the smothering shelter of the rocks. A heavy, oared workboat was moored close by on the shore.

Dave Bullen pointed. "Blaine's headquarters," he whispered huskily. He got only a curt nod from Pete Kerrigan.

Gradually the shadow crept off the bay as the moon lifted high above the eastern cliff. The inner edge of the bay was revealed. Here the shore was a jagged mass of rocks and boulders, there a flat ledge, farther on, a stretch of sand.

Pete uttered a soft exclamation. The thing down there that had looked like a mound of rock in the shadow was quite different under the moon. It was a schooner, rolled over almost on her beam ends on a patch of sandy beach, with stumps of two masts pointing inland.

Mike Kerrigan's ship, a sorry sight to Mike Kerrigan's son even under that soft light! Pete gazed down grimly at the hulk, then slowly raised his glasses—good night-glasses with a wide field.

The mad violence of the hurricane had flung the *Marie* high on the sand; a hundred yards in either direction, and her fate would have been the rocks. Pete studied her soberly; he had had that deck underfoot years ago; he had set jib, staysail, fore and main on those butt ends of masts, with the old man watching beside the wheel.

Something in the sand beside her bowsprit caught his eye. Frowning, he focused the glasses more sharply.

"What you got?" Bullen muttered. "Man flat on the beach down there."

Bullen gulped at Pete's tone. "Dead?"

"He isn't moving any," Pete replied curtly. He searched the beach with new care, then let the binoculars drop to his chest and jerked a hand downward. Bullen followed him, making even less noise than Pete, who made little in that cautious descent over the weathering slope of the rocks.

In a few minutes they stood above the man on the sand. Dead, but he was still warm. A tall, massively muscled man with a thinnish layer of fat around his middle.

He had writhed over onto his side with his legs drawn up in agony; but the wound that had killed him was in his back. A knife-thrust. There was too much blood for a bullet wound, and since Pete had reached that island he had heard no shot. The shadow of the *Marie's* bowsprit lay across the shoulders of the corpse.

Bullen moved to scrutinize the face at a different angle.

"Big Joe," he said. "He sailed in island schooners, and worked in ship-

yards. I've seen him often with George Blaine."

"With Blaine," Pete repeated sardonically. "I wonder what Blaine will accuse this man of."

He looked across the sleeping bay toward the silent tents. Something he saw out of the corner of his eye jerked his head around to the right. His eyes, drilling through the moonlight past the slanting house of the schooner, made out a figure coming across the rocks toward this beach.

Pete grabbed Bullen's arm and dragged him into cover of the schooner's bow. Secure in the shadow, they watched. The newcomer moved steadily along toward the stranded ship.

Pete grunted; narrowed eyes intent on that slender form.

"A kid! No, by blazes, a girl!" he whispered. "What's a girl doing on this blasted rock?"

"Huh?" Bullen muttered. He studied the figure in slacks. "Say, Blaine's got a daughter, name of Dot, but—"

The pressure of Pete's fingers stopped him; he obeyed the unspoken command to move around the stem to better concealment.

Suddenly the girl broke into a run. She had seen the body sprawling in the moonlight. Though the sand was loose under her feet, she made good time. She flung herself to her knees beside the dead man, then started as she saw the blood.

"Joel!" Her voice was faint, breathless, compassionate. "Joel!"

She started to her feet. She was poised for flight; her eyes were everywhere. Her light hair shone vividly in the moon's rays. But she paused to make sure that he was dead.

Pete Kerrigan stepped out around the bow.

CHAPTER THREE

DOT BLAINE took a quick step forward, then recoiled in astonishment.

"Who—" she whispered.

Her right hand flashed abruptly, fast and white under the moon. In an instant's time she had an automatic out of her shirt-front—a sizable automatic with a wicked blue gleam.

"Stand still!" she cried. "Where's my father?"

She took a step forward as if to force an answer; then recovering her wits quickly, drew back to where her pistol more than balanced Pete's advantage in strength and size.

"What have you done with my father, you—murderer?" she demanded furiously. "Where is he? Speak up! Who are you? Why did you kill this man?"

"The man you want is George Blaine," Pete said dryly. "This poor fellow trusted him. It's dangerous."

He did not move; his eyes, straining sidewise, told him that Bullen had not followed him out of cover.

"You dare accuse my father, you thug!" she cried. She glanced along the shore. "Get down flat in the sand," she commanded. "Flat! And don't try any sudden move. You're—you're under arrest!"

Pete laughed softly at that civilized phrase, so incongruous on this rock in the sea. He dropped, cross-legged, to the sand, facing Dot Blaine.

She pivoted quickly toward the sloping stone side of the bluff.

"Dad!" she called. "Dad!"

Her gun-barrel was off him for only an instant, then swung back. She listened hopefully, but not even an echo of her own clear voice came back to her. Kerrigan sat still, watching her. He pressed his arm cautiously against his own gun, safely invisible in the shoulder holster under his shirt.

"You'd better talk," she said. Her voice was thin with tension. "Where is my father?"

"He'll turn up—with a good story," Kerrigan said coolly. "He's talented that way."

Idly he ran his fingers through the sand. It was cool now. He kept his head bent, turned toward her, but again he was straining his eyes sidewise for a glimpse of Bullen.

The man's silence behind the schooner might mean he meant to try something fast on this little Amazon. That might be dangerous. For a girl in a turmoil of grief and fear, her hold on the automatic was rather steady.

From the bow of the schooner, slantingly above her head, came a faint sound of scrambling. She wheeled and snapped up the pistol.

Pete flung the sand in his cupped hand full in her face and followed it in a quick plunge forward. The gun flicked back toward him. Before his outthrust hand could knock it aside, it spat fire at him. The roar that blasted his ears was like part of the searing pain that creased his left side. Next instant his hand closed desperately on the gun. It bucked and thundered again as his other hand smacked her off her feet.

Panting, he wrenched the gun away and pinned her down with a knee across her shoulders.

"You little hellion, stay there!" he snapped. He pawed at his side and took his hand away, bloody. Her bullet had plowed a furrow across his ribs, level with his heart.

Bullen lowered himself with scrambling feet down the steep slanting deck of the schooner. The sand flew as he darted toward them, heedless of Pete's angry glare.



"Please listen!" Pete said coldly. "Neither Bullen nor I killed this man. I think I know who did. I'm going to make sure."

"Gi' me that gun, Kerrigan!" he gasped. He jerked a hand backward. "There's somebody else comin' the same way as the girl came."

PETE looked; then handed him Dot Blaine's automatic.

"Bring him in," he said "Don't shout."

Bullen ducked around into the shadow. Although there was somebody or something moving back on a ledge beside the water, Pete could make out no more than that.

The girl was sobbing with rage or pain, and her arms were moving spasmodically toward her eyes. Pete took his knee off her shoulder and let her sit up to brush sand out of her face. He watched her glumly. She stopped sobbing but kept her hands over her eyes.

"Please listen!" he said coldly. "Neither Bullen nor I killed this man. But I think I know who did. I'm going to make sure. Meanwhile I suggest you behave yourself and keep out of it."

Slowly she took her hands away from her streaming eyes and peered at him.

"Kerrigan!" she murmured. "He called you Kerrigan. Yes! I can see

you're like Captain Kerrigan—that-traitor!"

Pete laughed, deep in his throat. "It takes elevation to launch an insult, Miss Blaine," he said, emphasizing that hated name, "and you haven't got it."

He stood up, found his handkerchief and placed it like a pad against his ribs. He moved his left arm gingerly as he tore strips off his shirttail and secured it there. She watched, not offering to help, patted at her streaked face and ran her fingers back through her curly hair. Her eyes shifted from him to search the sand and the rocks rising from this beach.

Pete grimly contemplated the girl and the corpse. He listened. From the direction in which Bullen had pursued that phantom enemy came no sound. He moved a step toward the schooner.

"What was your father's purpose in coming to this island?" he asked brusquely.

She did not answer. She was slowly getting to her feet. He frowned uncertainly. He stepped around the Marie's bow and stared at a long baulk of timber. It was almost under her, and stretched toward the water: A skid.

"Don't bother to tell me he was going to steal my schooner," he said crisply. "That's too thin."

"Steal!" she flared. "That's *our* schooner! My dad bought the right to salvage her from the bank holding Mike Kerrigan's estate. It's ours!"

THERE it was again, civilized chatter on a tropic island boiling with primitive emotions.

A fast lie, and not one a guy who had just flown in from the Pacific could disprove. He had skipped the bank when he had learned George Blaine was off to Dirk Island. Without his assent, would those penny-jugglers who had his signature to all kinds of papers dare to close a deal with the man who had called Mike Kerrigan a traitor? Of course not! The thing to do was to put pressure on this girl, break her down.

"You'd better sit down again," he said sternly. "I'm not through with you. You attacked me a bit too fast. Maybe you were in cahoots with your father, killing that poor devil. I have some more ques—"

Her hand flipped up toward him. Next instant all the pangs of hell burned in his eyes. He dropped to his knees, paying frantically. She learned

Pete had no time to do more than knock the knife aside and slam the fellow across the head with his .38.



fast; she had flung a handful of sand squarely into his face in furious retaliation; and now, as he scrambled up again, he heard her feet pelting away along the shore.

She took to the wet sand to run faster: his ears told him that; his eyes did nothing but torture him. Almost blind, he ran stumblingly toward the water and thrust his head under again and again. The salt water stung, but not like the sand. He arraigned the little so-and-so in heartfelt phrases, but softly, for the pleasure of his own ears.

He lifted his head. He heard her distant voice, calling:

"Dad! Where are you? 'Dad!'"

It sounded—desperate. He listened, eyes streaming with tears and salt water. Again and again that strained voice rose over the island. No other voice answered.

By the direction of the sound, she had left the curving shore of the bay and was circling inland, over rocky

rising ground. Finally she ceased to call.

Pete looked along the beach toward where Bullen had faded out of sight in pursuit of the unknown enemy who had not been far behind the girl. Not the slightest sound came to his alert ears. Perhaps Bullen was stalking the other man, or perhaps they were lying flat on the rocks, each afraid a move would show him to the other. As still, perhaps, as dead Joe, waiting so patiently beside him.

"THAT'LL be a long chase," he decided. "Probably it's Blaine he's after."

Waiting the outcome, he circled the schooner. Halfway around, he stooped to pick up something soft his foot had touched. It was a bit of oakum. He turned to examine the ship's planking. Under that blazing moon it was easy enough to make out that somebody had been calking the seams of the *Marie*. In that blazing sun she had

opened up wide. He found a place on her bottom where a plank had been replaced. A rough job, but tight enough.

Evidence that Blaine was planning to salvage her, as the girl had insisted.

"Well, maybe he did make a deal with the bank," Pete reflected uncertainly. "Nobody but a nut would take the risk of stealing a schooner known all over the Caribbean."

He looked back at the dead man. Then, if this were just a small salvage job, why the rough stuff?

"On the other hand, why would a guy—even one like Blaine—bring his daughter along if he expected a dust-up?" he asked himself.

Of course a little vixen like that might invite herself and make it stick.

He put aside detection, impulsively climbed up over the rail and scaled the deck to the companion leading down to the cabin. At the head of the steps he paused.

The island had gone back to its semblance of an unpeopled lunar landscape. Not a sign of life—only a little breath of heat from the rocks. But there were people on Dirk, including at least one with the lust to kill.

CHAPTER FOUR

PETE stared soberly at the broken steering-wheel. Maybe the old man had died with his hands gripping those spokes. No; not likely: she had been anchored in the bay as the hurricane piped up; more likely he'd been up forward letting go another anchor, or giving the plunging ship more scope on the chain.

He descended the weird incline her position made of the companionway. At the bottom, in complete blackness, he pulled out his flashlight. It was a mournful sight, that once comfortable cabin. At the expense of some cargo space, Mike Kerrigan had given himself decent living accommodations. Now the cabin was a splintered mess. The sea had done a job on her, leaving little to remind Pete of polished mahogany trim, rows of books with a batten across them to keep them in place, many lockers, a comfortable chair, well lashed, a table set on gimbals—the stuff of a home.

He frowned at a locker in the forward bulkhead which had served the old man as a safe. Its splintered door had more the look of a man's violence than the seas. Nothing in it now.

He shook himself and got down to the business of going over her.

Half an hour later, back at the companion ladder, he switched off his torch. He had been through her from lazarette to forepeak. He ended up with a furrowed forehead.

She was just what she looked from outside, a hull that, with freight rates where they were, was probably worth the easy job of tightening her up and skidding her off the beach. Nothing mysterious about her, except that locker and compartment in her had been broken open. Some venturesome crook in a native craft had tried a bit of wrecking. Nothing mysterious.

"Nothing unless you count four or five hundredweight of rock ballast in the bilge and an anchor-chain unshackled below deck," he amended.

Probably there was some explanation if a man were less thick in the head, for that pile of rock below. By the looks of it, the rock was off this very island. It wasn't precious ore; it was just volcanic rock. And yet the *Marie* had never carried that sort of inside ballast. And that small amount didn't mean anything as ballast, anyway.

He went forward for a second look at the other thing he didn't under-

stand. There it was, in the chain-locker—four or five fathom of chain, the bitter end of one of the *Marie's* anchor cables, with an open shackle in good condition at the outboard end on top of the piled links. The pin of the shackle was gone.

It didn't tell him any more at a second inspection.

Was he on a fool's errand here? The dead man Joe answered that. There was more going on on this island than the salvaging of a ship!

He wondered suddenly if that unshackled chain meant treachery on board the *Marie*—past treachery to his father. When a man like Mike Kerrigan finishes in a hurricane with the brand of traitor on him, it isn't too much to suspect treachery.

"This is one more for Blaine to explain," Pete told himself.

He dropped to the sand, then scrambled up in a hurry to face two men coming along the beach.

"It's me," Dave Bullen's voice said. "I got him. And look what I got."

Pete stared at his prisoner. A swarthy young man, thin, small-boned, with a big head. Pete used his flashlight on him. The big head was mostly hair, curly, very black, above dark, regular features. His expression was somehow remote, like that of a man asleep; and his black eyes looked past the light and past Pete's face.

"Quite a zombie, hey?" Bullen said.

"It took you awhile," Pete said.

"Who is this?"

"Luis. Cook an' boy in Blaine's camp. He don't talk even much spig—don't like to."

Luis stood motionless, looking at neither of them.

"Keep him on ice here for me," Pete commanded. "I'll be back."

"Wait!" said Bullen. "I want to talk to you. . . . Look! Have you got a gun?"

Pete Kerrigan paused. Bullen was on his side, but he decided to misunderstand. "What do I want with the girl's gun?" he asked. "You keep it. Don't give it back to her if she should show up and get charming."

Abruptly he started slogging along down the beach in the direction of Blaine's tents. By now the girl's circling course might have taken her back to the spit beside the opening into the bay. If she wasn't there, perhaps Blaine would be at home.

He hit a spot where the shore turned to rock. Near a slab of stone he stopped. He bent and picked up a crowbar, pitted with rust. Somebody, some time ago, looking for something, had turned that slab over.

"Nice exercise," he muttered, and went on.

A couple of hundred feet along, he heard unmistakably the scuff of a shoe close behind him. He quickened his

pace and kept going. It wasn't imagination. He heard it again. He was being followed. He kept moving. The man behind wasn't trying to close up; he was trying to be quiet.

Pete looked hopefully for a cloud that might obscure the moon. But the only cloud near that overzealous disk was moving slowly. He walked on toward rougher going. The place was piled with boulders and cut with troughlike depressions where softer rock had eroded. As he dipped into one of these bottoms, he flattened out, crawled sidewise behind a ten-ton chunk of stone and slid out his gun.

The man behind was trying to be silent, but his stiff soles betrayed him. Pete stepped out into his path.

The man started back. His right hand darted to his belt, and he jerked out a knife. It was fast going—a move so smooth-flowing as to seem instinctive. He jabbed upward—practiced, automatic, fast.

Pete had no time to do more than knock the knife aside with his long arm and slam the fellow across the head with his .38. Instinctively he put a lot more power behind the blow than he had intended; he had not figured on any such swift reaction from surprise.

The man went down with a thump, completely out. As Pete dropped beside his sweaty victim, he wasn't feeling too sure he hadn't cracked his skull. A husky, broad-faced man, darker than Luis, with a nose knocked to starboard. The knife had slid out of his limp hand. Pete picked it up and climbed on the boulder for a quick look.

He hadn't really expected to see anything. But there was another fellow, betrayed by his white shirt, not a hundred feet away, up on the slope.

AT sight of Pete, he turned and ran. His course was up the rise, away from the bay. He was a fat man, but long-legged and fast.

Pete jerked up his gun and opened his mouth to shout. But he didn't. There was something about this island that made him not want to shout or to reveal to another man that he had a gun. It was a sort of pressure for caution, as tangible as an atmosphere can never be.

Pete knelt down beside his unconscious prize. Bent Nose, somehow, was vaguely familiar. He was breathing, and blood trickled from the cut above his temple. The man's shirt over his chest was wet. He hadn't developed a sweat like that merely by following Pete a few hundred yards.

Pete took out his flashlight, shielded it carefully and played a beam on one of the limp hands. The palm was unprepossessing, but it hadn't the hard, calloused look of a palm that earns



bread in a shipyard; the calker's mallet and iron put a thickish skin on the hands. Then why had Blaine brought him here?

He rubbed the knife-blade on the shirt. A trace of something came off it, but it was too dark in color for his flashlight to tell him whether it was blood. He lifted the knife to his nostrils. Did the acrid odor of blood come from the knife? It was hard to form a judgment.

Pete stood up. The impression persisted that these men had been trailing him, not stalking him. What for? Irritably he shook this new mystery out of his head.

He had been hunting for Dot Blaine or her unpleasant father. He wasn't going to be deflected. With a head like that, this fellow might be out for hours and wake up too dazed or sulky to talk—if he could talk English. And as for getting away—that would be quite a trick on this island. Even if he revived able to run like a gazelle, Bullen's boat was well enough hidden under the bulge of the cliff until Pete or Bullen got back.

The leisurely cloud floated across the moon, and blackness swept across the island. It was a good time to get away unseen, if that other one had stopped running to watch.

He started, with the knife in his hand. Without moonlight it wasn't too easy to keep a course, and the going was slow. He worked down to

where he could hear water rippling; and as the irises of his eyes widened, he made better time along the shore. He came at last to where sand again replaced the ledge of rock underfoot.

He stopped beside a small boulder, heaved it up, dropped the knife into the hollow beneath and replaced the boulder. Where the sand began. . . . He could find it again if need be.

The edge of the bay was turning more sharply to the left now. That meant he was starting out onto the sandspit, away from the hot rocks where Blaine had pitched his two small tents. He plodded along.

The cloud thinned to a silver film, and he saw a tent off to the right. *One* tent? There was only one tent standing on that stretch of sand. He quickened his pace and crossed a track scuffed by many feet. Why *one* tent?

CHAPTER FIVE

PETE came upon the place where another tent had been staked out.

The marks were there. Clothes, food, equipment, all were scattered on the sand, but there was no tent. He looked for water. Though preoccupied, he would have paused for a drink. This hot rock had drawn the moisture out of him. There was no water.

The standing tent had no occupant. The same evidence of hasty search or

looting met him inside the shelter. Somewhere outside he heard a sudden thump, like wood against wood. Was this a trap? He dived for the opening. Pivoting on the sand, he saw no menace. He listened intently. The moon came through the edge of the big cloud, though more clouds threatened. His eyes ranged farther. He began to run.

The heavy rowboat which had been moored close to the tents in the bay was now moving through the inlet toward the sea. He caught the glint of a swinging oar-blade.

He swerved out of clogging dry sand toward the seaward side of the spit and found harder footing under him. He ran faster.

There was only one person in the boat. A few feet farther on he made out that it was the Blaine girl. She had abandoned silence now and was swinging the heavy oars with desperate strength.

"Stop!" he shouted, brandishing his automatic. "Beach that boat or—"

Something about the way Dot Blaine's slight figure was handling those heavy blades warned him talk was useless. A shot over her head would be no better. Stubborn! He holstered his gun, discarded his flashlight and binoculars, and splashed at full speed into the sea.

Salt water stung the wounded flesh of his side. He flailed away from shore with speed and power. The tide

With one hand hooked on the gunwale, he clamped the other under her armpit and heaved her up. She scrambled nimbly over the side, her ready hands reaching toward an oar.

AS he pulled himself up to follow her over the side, he noted sourly that she glanced at him before she decided to smack the oar blade on the surface. A black fin lifted a moment above the water, then skimmed away, submerging.

They sat still, panting, glowering at each other. He moved first, to retrieve the oars. The boat was drifting seaward. He trod on canvas. The missing tent was bundled up in the bottom.

"There's the boat," Pete said, staring over his shoulder. "Keep your eye on the ball. Bullen's not on deck. Have that automatic ready just in case."

"What's the idea?" he asked her "D'you think you could buck the tradewind in an open boat?"

"I was going to leeward," she retorted. "That's what the tent is for—a sail."

He stared. St. Matthew, a small target, was forty miles to the south west. "The sun would get you, even if—"

"My dad's in trouble on an island full of murderous thugs. He needs help, if it's not too late already."

Pete snorted.

She lifted her head defiantly.

"What could I do—alone?"

"How about this Luis?" he asked. "And—"

"Luis was why I had the gun," she said. "He— I don't trust him. And I was being stalked—by two men. Not you. I ran from them—but when I reached the tents, our water and Dad's rifle were gone."

In silence he slid the oars back into the rowlocks and sat down on the rowing thwart. She watched him warily, her face without color in the moonlight.

"If you aren't deep in this—this thing, I advise you to let me go," she said suddenly.

Frowning, he looked past her to the somber bulk of Dirk Island. Its black silence was formidable, threatening.

"How many of you were landed here in Delgado's sloop?"

His question was abrupt, but he could see she was coolly deciding whether to answer.

"Four," she said. "Dad, Joe, Luis and I."

Not enough manpower to float the Marie. She read his doubt.

"Dad was planning the job first. Later Delgado was to bring more men and gear."

The size of the little tents indicated no more than four occupants. Then who were these other—he accepted her word—thugs?

"Nobody else here?"

She shook her head.

"Look!" he said rapidly. "Three years ago Mike Kerrigan came to this island in command of a trading-schooner. Some fancy crooks who called themselves Gamecocks jumped him. He lost his ship and his life. Your father,—his mate,—survived the rough stuff and got back to St. Thomas in good enough shape to do a thorough job of blackening Mike Kerrigan's name. Now your father comes here to float the schooner, and drops out of sight a few minutes after one of his men is knifed." His voice became heavy with irony. "Quite a hand at ducking trouble, isn't he?"

"You know there's more to what's going on on Dirk than either of us can guess," she declared. "You wouldn't say so much if you were sure what you're up against."

That was true enough. "I'm up against George Blaine, a very slippery gent," he said stubbornly. "And he's up against me."

Her voice reacted angrily. "Stop playing the Boy Avenger and get down to business," she said. "I heard Dad leave his tent tonight. He's been restless, working out here to float the schooner. Joe followed him. I tried to go back to sleep, but couldn't."

"Well?"

"Somebody killed Joe tonight—not three years ago. Dad depended on Joe and trusted him. He'd been Joe's friend for years. He didn't kill Joe, especially with a knife. Who did?"

STUNG by her gibe, he conceded grudgingly that there was some sense in what she said. Murder—tonight. While he was silent and she faced him as silently, the boat drifted slowly away from Dirk, with little waves beginning to lap at its sides.

"One of your men may have—"

He cut in quickly: "Bullen, the only man I brought with me, hadn't been out of my sight since we landed."

"The only man? But—"

"Right," he admitted. "We have unknown company."

He saw her shudder.

He didn't trust George Blaine. But what was the sinister business? What did he stand to gain—and why the girl?



flooding out the narrow opening of the bay had the boat in its grasp, but it had him too. He gained.

When he was close, she lifted the nearer oar from the rowlock, and with both arms, raised it threateningly.

"Keep away from this boat!" she called. "I mean it!"

Pete didn't doubt that. But once that cumbersome oar came down, he'd have some time before she got it up again.

He plowed in straight amidships, estimating the distance. The oar started down. Was there a slight hesitation? He swerved sharply.

She was trying to make her blow a threatening sweep that would keep it out of the water and yet threaten his head. He ducked, thrust up an arm, caught the edge of the blade and jerked savagely.

The sudden pull flung her against the gunwale, half over the side. Dropping the oar, she managed to cling, but the boat was heeling and she lost her grip. She plunged overside. He shoved the oar up into the boat and swam toward her. She met him with a vigorous underwater kick in the shoulder. It stopped him.

Something big splashed in the water close behind him. He stroked in despite her kicks and grabbed her.

"You blamed little fool, get aboard!" he panted. "Sharks!"

"We're both looking for your father," he said abruptly. "After that, we'll see. But you're not trying for St. Matthew under the sun that's due soon."

He jerked a hand at the clouded moon. "The night's going," he said. "You help me find my father," she said. "If you want the truth in detail about Mike Kerrigan, he'll give it to you."

A cloud smothering the moon hid from each of them the doubting glance of the other. It would also hide the boat from shore. He began rowing northward.

"Where are you heading?"

Her voice was low. She understood the need for caution, now that they had a chance to conceal their movements.

"Going to round the northern end of the island and get back to my—my base."

"Distrust me if you will, but don't think me a fool," she said curtly. "I suppose your boat's in that rocky lagoon hidden under the overhang of the cliff."

Pete was jolted. If this girl could guess— He began to row faster. She had wrapped bits of canvas torn from the tent around the oars. The boat moved almost soundlessly. When he was sure he was past the sandspit, he drew in closer to the shadowed shore, where the chances of being seen were less. But he could not forget that the boat had floated for a while in the midst of a moonlit sea.

He could make her out easily as she sat huddled rather forlornly in the broad sternsheets. Occasionally when he got too close to the rocky shore, she would motion or whisper: "Pull on your port oar."

Suddenly she straightened up and pointed a slim arm in quick surprise. Swinging about, he smothered a groan

CHAPTER SIX

THE hull of a boat, bow upended sharply, showed blackly against the lighter sea. It must be impaled on some pinnae rock. The way of the rowboat carried him closer. He saw a mast, snapped off just above the deck. He grunted again, with relief. This wasn't Bullen's motorboat. He studied her in silence. Abandoned! She had come to grief no more than fifty feet off the low ledge that formed the shoreline here.

The craft was a sloop. Her stern was deep under water. She was shot: a desolate, sinister sight.

Dot Blaine gave a little cry. "Delgado's!" she whispered. "I—I thought he was at St. Thomas."

He worked in closer, and his seaman's eyes had a look at a break in

her rail just aft of the bowsprit. The girl was right. This was the sloop with the torn mainsail—the soft-spoken Delgado's ill-kept craft.

"This boat wasn't here this afternoon," Dot Blaine said. "I walked this way an hour before sunset."

"Right," he said grimly. "I'd say he hit while the moon was still down behind the high eastern cliff."

All he could remember about Delgado was a flashing smile, luminous black eyes, correct if stilted English, clean white trousers, a certain imperiousness even while he made his polite request for gasoline.

Delgado didn't have a dinghy, but it was not likely that he or his two men could fail to reach that low ledge a few feet away after his sloop had taken the rock through her bottom. But—

He remembered the big thug with the bent nose which had seemed vaguely familiar. Of course! One of Delgado's hands! And the fat man who fled was another. Pete thinned his lips.

"I DON'T understand," Dot Blaine said. She sounded puzzled enough. "Why didn't he come into the bay instead of closing in on this hidden, rocky shore—"

Her voice trailed off. Her face lifted quickly to his.

"Yes!" he said. "Delgado and his men killed Joe."

"And Dad?" she whispered. "Did they kill him too? Or capture him? But why? Why?"

"How did your father come to hook up with Delgado?"

She was ready enough to speak now. "When Dad arranged to salvage the *Marie*, he needed a boat to run to St. Thomas. Delgado heard somehow, and offered to charter the sloop he had just bought, for a price Dad could pay. And he recommended Luis to us, too."

Pete Kerrigan grunted, and had a hard look at the cheap sloop, stove in and finished. That boat was cheap enough for Blaine's purse for a reason, the same reason that had led Delgado in secret to turn back so stealthily after his mainsail tore, and reach this treacherous shore in utter blackness. Delgado, obviously more than master of a dilapidated native sloop, wasn't risking murder just to steal suddenly a little schooner that had lain abandoned on the beach for three years. But there was a reason.

"Where's Delgado from?" Pete asked. "What's he doing among the islands?"

"He's a Colombian, an educated man, perhaps an engineer," Dot said. "I saw him use a slide-rule one day in discussing what power was needed to float the *Marie*. Perhaps he got into some trouble in his own country; all he told us was he liked living in the islands, and intended to build up a shipping business."



With sudden strength

"Any water in the rowboat?" Pete asked abruptly.

"No. It was all taken from our camp before I got there."

Pete tightened his grip on the oars. "It's time I knew George Blaine's version of what happened after this plane out of nowhere reached Dirk," he said. He glanced toward the island. "Not too loudly," he added, and began to row.

Dot moved forward, and sat cross-legged on the flattened tent.

"That night Mike Kerrigan put out his heavy anchor," she said, "he left my dad in the cabin listening to the hurricane reports on the radio, and rowed ashore. He'd spoken of carrying a hawser ashore for more security if the radio reports showed the center heading toward Dirk."

"While he was ashore, Dad heard a plane's motors. An hour later Mike Kerrigan came back aboard with two armed white men—a South American, and a fellow who talked like a city tough. Gamecocks."



Blaine wrenched himself free of Luis' grip. He tried to dive.

He snorted at the name. "It sounds more formidable in Spanish: *Gallós de pelea*," she said.

"Gallowsbirds," he growled.

"They poked guns in Dad's ribs and told him to be good. In their presence Mike said:

"Go easy, George. We've been taken over by five men—four o' these Gamecocks and an escaped Nazi—a U-boat captain. They've got a rendezvous with a sub near here—to put this Nazi aboard. We're dead men if we don't do what we're told, and rich men if we do."

"You mean you're going to meet the sub in this schooner?" Dad asked.

"They've taken over the schooner; we're working it for 'em—to save our lives."

Pete Kerrigan's oars splashed as they touched the sea. He shook his head angrily, then in silence got better control of the blades.

"The two Gamecocks drove the crew forward and forced Dad to the after-deck to watch the wind," Dot

went on, low-voiced, steady. "They sent your father ashore without a guard. They seemed—sure of him."

Pete growled in his throat. He opened his mouth, then snapped it shut and went on rowing faster through the dark sea.

"Two hours passed before Mike Kerrigan returned to where he had beached his rowboat. Even in the sheltered bay, the water was rough. The wind was stiff and still coming up. He had to make two trips to bring aboard three men and a big pile of gear—sea-bags and old suitcases.

"They didn't allow Dad to leave the deck. By the light shining up the companionway he caught a glimpse of the Nazi and heard him speak in German to one of the others. Mike Kerrigan seemed exhausted, hardly able to move, but he helped lug the Nazi's gear below. He tried to speak to Dad again, but they insisted he come below too.

"While the heavy gear was being stowed in the cabin, Dad managed to

slip forward and open the forecabin hatch. He told the Virgin Islanders what was happening and gave them a chance to swim ashore. Two men followed him overside. The Gamecocks fired at them but in the darkness all three made the beach. They took refuge in a cave. The other six stayed aboard.

"Later that night the hurricane hit. Two of the crew and two Gamecocks survived when the gale swept the schooner and pounded her ashore. The rocks got all the others and your father was drowned below decks."

Dot's voice was thin, almost apologetic. "That's what happened. I'm sorry."

"Drowned below decks!" Pete repeated. His voice shook. "That tops it all! Mike Kerrigan drowned below decks on his own ship during a blow! Of all the crazy nonsense! Look! Did you know Mike Kerrigan?"

"No, Dad came down here in 1942 after exposure in a lifeboat finished him for North Atlantic weather. I

took a war shipping job and joined him in the islands after this happened."

"It didn't happen!" Pete said violently.

"You've heard, haven't you, how the two Gamecocks tried to get away to St. Matthew?" the girl asked quietly. "A patrol found the boat and one man dead in the bottom. Apparently he had stabbed himself and the other had jumped overboard. The sun—and thirst."

Pete glanced at the eastern sky, above the black bulk of Dirk. Although the moon was still high, around the northern end of Dirk pale dawn was creeping. The sun—and thirst. She had known that and yet she risked the fate of the Gamecocks herself. And now this credulous girl who thought his father was a traitor and a coward was watching him and wondering, and maybe fearing him.

He pulled his automatic from the shoulder holster and shoved it, butt first, toward her.

"Hang onto that for me," he said gruffly. "It gets in my way. We'll have to handle Delgado first. After that—I'll talk to your father."

Her hand came out and took the pistol. "All right," she said gravely. "That's fair—and sensible."

The atmosphere had improved—in the boat. But not on Dirk.

He rowed harder, racing the sun that was still down under the sea somewhere to windward.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE sun was up but sulking under a bank of clouds when he found a westerly entrance through the reef fringing the northern ledges of Dirk. He was gritty-eyed and tired, but nervously alert.

"There's the boat," he said, staring ahead over his shoulder with great relief. "Still snug under the cliff."

Dot Blaine lifted her sagging head. But she stared at him, not past him at Bullen's motorboat. Her brown face grew red. "Oh!" she said.

She was looking at the nasty crease her bullet had made across his ribs. The bandage had carried away.

"The bullet bounced off," he said hastily. "See? There's our boat. We'll get a long drink of water and some grub."

"And you wouldn't let me row!" she said. "Please—"

"Keep your eye on the ball. Bullen's not on deck. Have that automatic handy just in case."

He rowed steadily across the lagoon, looking ahead over his shoulder frequently. She watched tensely.

The motorboat floated on the gray, sleeping water under the gray sky

like a dream ship, with anchor line curving slackly into the mirrorlike water. It looked utterly deserted, but the smallboat in which he and Bullen had landed a few hours ago was made fast astern.

Fifty yards away, Pete let his oars trail.

"Bullen!" he called, pitching his voice just loudly enough to reach the boat.

A head jerked up in the cockpit, quickly, the automatic reaction of a man who had been more than half-asleep. It wasn't Bullen's head. It vanished instantly.

"Down!" Pete muttered to the girl. He dug in his oars and swung the boat. With powerful strokes he pulled away.

Dot Blaine had almost obeyed him. But she kept her eyes above the dubious shelter of the gunwale. She held Pete's automatic alertly, just out of sight, and her tongue was caught between her teeth as she watched for a hostile move on the boat.

Bullen came out on deck. "Kerrigan!" he called. "Where you been? Come alongside!"

Just beyond accurate pistol-shot Pete shipped his oars and let the boat drift.

"Who's with you?" he demanded.

"Nobod—"

Before Bullen could finish the word, another man came out into the cockpit. It was Delgado, and he waved a friendly hand and bowed amiably to Dot. He said a few quick words to Bullen.

Dave Bullen planted his hands on the coaming and leaned toward them.

"Let's be reasonable about this, Kerrigan!" he bawled. "But don't figger you can keep me out o' my share o' the moola. I rate a piece, an' I'm gettin' it!"

"That greedy rat!" Pete snapped.

"What is this? His share—of what?"

His glance darted toward Dot. She shrugged.

"Delgado must have promised him a lot to make him team up with a murderer," she said. "But—a lot of what?"

Pete Kerrigan was holding himself in, though his eyes blazed at Dave Bullen. "I'd like to break his—" He cut off that heartfelt wish and raised his voice:

"Well, go on, Bullen."

Delgado laid a quick hand on Bullen's arm to stop him, and spoke.

"Please!" he called. "Let us all be sensible. You have played a good game. You have lost—but only half, if you give in now. Look!"

He turned to the cabin of the boat and waved his hand commandingly. Close to his feet in the cockpit, a fat man stood up. Another, with a bandaged head, came uncertainly, almost

staggering out of the cabin. Delgado's crew, these two, and Pete recognized them easily enough as the men who had trailed him that night. The bandage on Bent Nose's head was Pete's own doing.

Delgado was still beckoning. From the cabin there was pushed into sight another man, a lean little man with hair somewhat prematurely white, whose hands were bound behind his back.

"Dad!" Dot Blaine murmured, and she drew a quick breath. "They've got him—but he's alive!"

Pete Kerrigan looked at the man with cold eyes.

BACK of George Blaine, shoving him out into the cockpit, was Luis, the big-headed, swarthy youth with the sleeping face.

"That traitor!" Dot said contemptuously. "I saw Delgado talking earnestly to him at St. Thomas, but—"

"I guess Joe made the mistake of being loyal to your father," Pete said.

Delgado's teeth glistened at them from suddenly parted lips. He gestured modestly, almost deprecatingly, at his four adherents and his prisoner, ranged along the rail.

"You see," he called. "I have everything. You have nothing—no escape, no food, no water. Be sensible, and we will all stay alive—and be rich enough."

"Rich?" Pete muttered. "There it is again! Rich?"

"Come on, son!" Bullen bawled. "What happened to that big guy was accidental. We c'n cover it up."

With sudden, furious strength George Blaine wrenched himself free of Luis' grip and lunged over the edge of the cockpit. His arms, a line still dangling around one, burst from behind his back. He tried to dive.

Delgado grabbed for him, hands moving like darting snakes. Next instant Luis was out of his trance and clutching him.

"Get away!" Blaine's voice, weak and hoarse, strained to them across the water. "Gamecock!" His hand pointed at Delgado before Luis could grab it. Though pinioned, he still struggled frantically. "The—missing—Gamecock! Don't trust—"

Bent Nose rounded on him, dark face savage under the bandage; his long fingers sank into Blaine's neck.

Dot Blaine jerked up the automatic. She fired; and the bullet, beyond accurate range, whirled astern of the boat. Bent Nose let go Blaine's throat and dropped flat in the cockpit. Luis and the fat man were a scant tick behind him.

"Easy on those cartridges!" Pete muttered to the girl.

Over in the motorboat, Delgado flipped out a pistol, jammed it into

Blaine's ribs and turned toward them. His teeth showed again in what was more of a snarl than a smile.

Dot lowered the pistol. "I—I couldn't h-have that beast at his throat!" she said faintly.

"Okay, but I don't have any spare clips here," Pete said.

At a word from Delgado, Bullen darted into the wheelhouse. The starter churned; the motor rumbled. The boat surged into motion; and Bullen, crouching, turned the wheel and sent his heavy craft plunging toward the rowboat.

Pete caught up the oars. "Down!" he panted as he got the rowboat moving. He spun the boat toward the island.

"Save those cartridges till they're close!"

He rowed with short, mighty strokes. Dot Blaine, hands on opposite gunwales, knelt in the stern. Her fingers held the heavy automatic steady, pointed off.

It was an impossible race. The motorboat ate up the distance between them. Her bow loomed high. No head showed above the wind-screen. No target!

Dot looked ahead and gestured suddenly to starboard. "Coral—shallows!" she gasped. "To the right!"

He swung the boat without losing the beat with his oars. The motorboat astern was almost on them, rising to stamp them under. He darted a look ahead and caught a glimpse of white coral through the clear water. It was close to the surface—but not much closer than was the metal-ridged stem of Bullen's boat. Any moment—"Over!" he yelled.

Dot Blaine splashed overboard. He twisted on the rowing-thwart, gripped the side and flung himself after her. He heard the crunch of the motorboat's bow as it slashed into the rowboat's stern. Then he went under; touched sharp coral with his outstretched hands, and shoved his head up through into the air again.

A yelp of anguish from Bullen pierced his ears, and then came the chatter of the reverse gear. The engine roared. He got feet onto the bottom and thrust on through thigh-deep water.

"Stop!" Delgado shouted. "Stop, or I'll shoot!"

Dot Blaine, just in front of Pete, swung around toward him. She thrust his gun at him. "Maybe you're a better shot than—"

"Oh!" he grunted, grabbing the pistol and pushing her. His ears were taut for the bark of Delgado's gun, but none came. Why not? They were easy pickings.

They floundered shoreward, side-stepped a spiny sea urchin and scrambled up a barnacle-studded ledge.

They flung themselves down in a shallow pool behind the protecting ridge of stone. Pete lifted his head for a quick look.

Delgado, pistol in hand, was crouching for instant action, in the cockpit. But he hadn't fired a shot. Not a shot. Bullen, down behind the side of the wheelhouse, was swinging the wheel, gunning the motor to reverse the boat. He yelled again in agony as the bow, with diminishing speed, crunched against coral. A moment later the power of the reverse gear dragged the boat into deeper water.

"He saved her, blast it!" Pete spluttered. "Well—maybe it's better to have 'em in the boat than ditched ashore with us. One gun is little casino against that bunch."

He wasn't feeling happy. They were trapped on Dirk.

CHAPTER EIGHT

DELGADO ordered no pursuit. The girl's boat was a wreck. The island was small. He would know where to find them. Pete drew a breath and scowled at Dot Blaine.

"You sure started something." "I would—again!" she said defiantly. "D'you think I'd stand there and let that creature throttle Dad?"

"You're about as diplomatic as your father," he said. "He has nerve," he added grudgingly. He kept lifting his head to watch. Delgado didn't fire. Bullen was maneuvering into deeper water, away from them.

"They wanted to scoop us up alive," Pete muttered.

"Did you hear? Delgado—one of the Gamecocks! Then—"

"Yes," Pete said grimly. "Maybe Delgado stabbed his friend in the boat off St. Matthew and got ashore."

He turned to look at Dot Blaine. "But why didn't your father recognize him, then?"

"He didn't see them all plainly on the night of the hurricane. And he never saw the survivors except at a big distance after that." She pointed toward the rocky slope descending inland from the eastern cliff. "He and the Virgin Islanders stayed in a cave somewhere up there, out of the sun. They had no weapons—and no water. To come out, would have been suicide."

Her eyes flashed. "You can't say—after what's just happened—that he's a coward!"

"No," Pete said slowly. "I can't say that."

Crouching there behind the ledge, watching Bullen maneuver cautiously into deeper water, he was grappling with the personality of George Blaine. That righteous, damn-the-

consequences outburst of Blaine didn't fit the conception of the man he had built up in his mind, the picture of a sneak and craven. It took guts, unselfishness, quixotism, something to launch a warning like that with hands bound, and killers bunched around him. There were guys like that, who wouldn't bend an inch but broke at the wrong time for their friends.

Something was screwy about his idea of Blaine as the perjured accuser of his dead captain.

Blaine must have believed what he reported about Mike Kerrigan.

Not for a moment did Pete's belief waver that Mike Kerrigan was a tough, wily, loyal, never-quitting old seaman.

He glanced uneasily at Dot Blaine. She was watching him, not their enemies in the boat. She didn't say another word. She was giving him time to think. No argument, just time to think after that one sentence of hot defense. He hadn't known they made girls like that.

"All right," he said shortly. "What your father said happened did happen. But you must believe Mike Kerrigan was a square-shooter."

He leaned toward her. "Don't you see? We've got to make Mike Kerrigan's acts conform to Mike Kerrigan's character, to make sense."

She frowned, looking toward the motorboat. "You mean—he acted in some hope of preventing the Gamecocks from getting that Nazi to the U-boat?"

"That's another thing," he said gloomily. "I don't believe the Gamecocks were merely flying a prisoner of war escaped from South America to a sub. It's too thin."

"Dad and I have wondered about that. It is rather elaborate—a seaplane to fly the man this far out to sea, when we know that U-boats ran right up to our beaches."

He nodded. "There must be a missing element—"

A hail from Bullen's motorboat halted him. It was Delgado. The man stood boldly on the cabin top forward.

"Kerrigan!" he called. "Kerrigan!"

Pete estimated the range quickly. Nothing but a rifle could reach. And Delgado had had a chance to plug him as they scrambled ashore. He stood up.

Delgado waved a hand. His voice was smooth:

"When you want water today, come aboard and have a talk. We'll be around in Cup Bay."

Again he tossed up his hand, amiably, and the motorboat churned toward a break in the coral. Bullen was still wary of the sea the trade-wind would kick up here when it revived.

"He's sure he has us," Dot said. "There's no water on the island."

A little pause dropped down on them. Involuntarily Pete glanced eastward. The cloudbank still obscured the sun, but already he could feel its striking power. What it would be like later— He turned away.



Delgado had the rifle in a lightning grab and whipped it around. But Pete's gun was a short-barreled automatic and his lead was slashing through Delgado's chest when that happened.

"What's Delgado got when he's got us?" he asked aloud.

"Only one thing," the girl reasoned: "Information—information about that missing element you were wondering about. It's plain he hasn't got anything out of Dad."

Glumly Pete Kerrigan sat down on the edge of the rock and dangled his wet feet in the water.

"We need cards to beat the hand Delgado's holding," he muttered. "What could we know about this island or the schooner that a Gamecock wouldn't know? Wait!"

But he didn't wait himself. He leaped to his feet. Dot Blaine, startled, turned toward the motorboat to face whatever new danger threatened. But the boat had already negotiated a pass in the reef and was churning southward down the leeward coast of Dirk. She darted an unhappy glance at it as it bore her captured father away.

"You said this gallowsbird Delgado was from Colombia?" Pete demanded, and hardly giving her time to nod: "That may be the tip-off!"

"Tell me!"

"It's such a lallapaloosa of an idea, that it's probably sour," he said, still

excited. "Come on! Quick—before the wind starts churning things up."

He jumped down behind the ledge and bent low to screen his movements from the vanishing motorboat. He loped eastward along the rocky shore. Dot followed in silence. He led her along to where the aluminum bones

ports. And he guessed what hasn't sunk into our skulls yet."

"What?"

"That it was the stuff in those shabby sea-bags and suitcases, not the alleged Nazi prisoner, that was so precious it rated using these Gamecocks, somehow supplying them with a sea-plane, risking a submarine."

"Gold?"

"Rats!" said Pete. "Gold! I'm surprised at you. Your mind is movie-conditioned."

"And your manners are non-existent!" Dot retorted. "Gold or grass-seed, I'm interested only as it helps Dad to get away. Go on!"

Pete rubbed his swollen lips, afraid to blurt out his thought for fear it would fade away if not first thoroughly buttressed with reason.

"Remember two Gamecocks came aboard the schooner with Mike. Why didn't all five come along and take over the ship? Because the others were watching something—or perhaps each other. Anyhow, they were sure they had Mike Kerrigan tamed with promises, as Delgado has tamed that blasted Bullen. They sent him back alone to get the others. And it was two hours before he returned to the shore of Cup Bay with the three men and the gear. Why two hours? That's the crux of it!"

Dot was mastering her impatience with much effort.

"A man could do a lot of reconnoitering in two hours," she conceded. "And more than reconnoitering on a black, wind-scoured rock," Pete said. He struck the blistered palm of his hand with his fist. "Yes! I found a lot of unexplained stone, several hundredweight, in the schooner. It would look like ballast but it was volcanic stone from Dirk which didn't make sense to me till now. Dot, that stone came aboard in the core of the Nazi's bags!"

CHAPTER NINE

DOT'S forehead puckered up in a little frown.

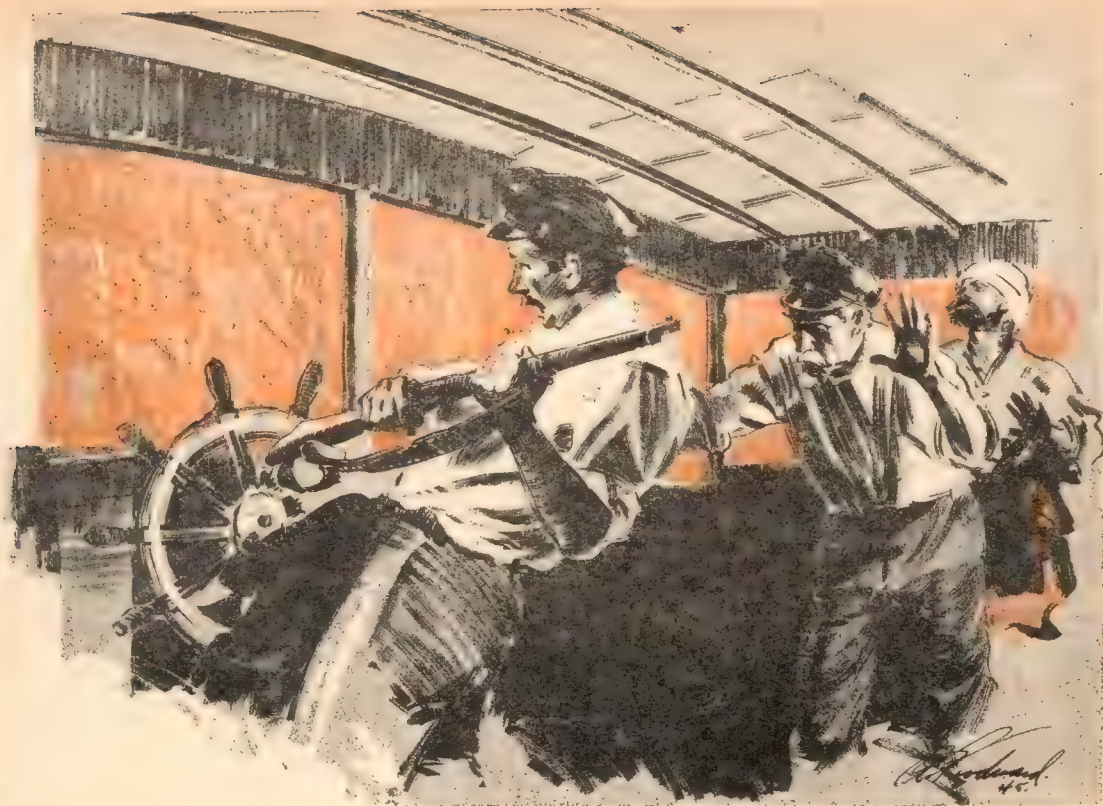
"You mean Mike Kerrigan managed to switch—"

"Why not? The stuff had to be lugged in short stages up along the edge of the cliff. That's the only practical way to carry it across this island, isn't it?"

Dot nodded.

"And those three crooks would be watching each other more carefully than the gear," Pete said. "Maybe they made Dad do most of the lugging; maybe he shadowed them and got at the bags as he could."

He turned eastward, staring up the ascending slope of the cliff. Inland immense boulders, sharp spurs, needle-



like prickly pear and other forms of cactus barred the way to Cup Bay.

"I ought to be right!" Pete muttered. It was a prayer. He flung himself down on the ledge and stared over into the shallow water beside the wreckage of the plane. Though this lagoon was a milky cauldron when the trade was piling seas in over the reef in this early morning calm, the surface was smooth as glass. Pete looked down through water colorless like air.

He saw only barnacled rocks, coral, waving fronds of seaweed, many little schools of fish, each kind brilliantly marked and colored more spectacularly than exotic flowers ashore. Dot dropped beside him and stared, too.

IN a minute he was up, muttering, and started climbing the slope of the cliff. Half a dozen times, at intervals of fifty feet, he repeated this minute scrutiny of the bottom.

Suddenly he uttered a whoop and grabbed the girl's shoulder. He pointed. "Where those sergeant majors—the fish—are browsing! See that oblong? It's no rock!"

Shaking with excitement, he leaped up and poised for a dive, eyes flicking to her face. Dot grabbed his ankle.

The cliff here was thirty feet high. "Don't play to the gallery! You'll break open your side. Climb down."

He put a solicitous hand on the stiff raw wound. "That's taking the gilt off the gingerbread," he said, crestfallen, and began to scramble down.

"I won't dive, either," she promised, and slipped lithely over the edge beside him. They made the descent with scant regard for safety, eyes glued on the thing in the water below. A foot above the surface he turned from the rock and plunged. He swam down six or seven feet and grasped the crusted, oblong block. He heaved it off the bottom with much effort.

As he got his feet down for a spring upward, a shape moved close to him. He recoiled, then saw it was Dot. Her outstretched arms thrust in among a clump of seaweed. They came out grasping doggedly another block.

He floundered to the surface, dumped his prize on the ledge and turned. Despite her most frantic kicking she was still below the surface, weighted down. The stuff was very heavy. He reached in, laid hold of an arm and dragged her up. While she gasped for breath, he took her block and lifted her out of the water.

Unceremoniously he laid her flat on her face to recover. His wet hands fumbled fruitlessly for long seconds before he could pull his claspknife from a sopping pocket. Next instant he was scraping away at the sea deposits on the block. The first stroke uncovered soft, pallid gray metal.

"I doped it!" Pete yelled. "Platinum! Plenty more below! Platinum! That's your missing element!"

HIS triumphant grin covered his face. "Get it? Not a Nazi bomber could leave the earth, not a piece of delicate electrical machinery could function in the Reich without it! The stuff was essential in making synthetic oil—"

"Don't be so—educational!" she panted. "They were smuggling it?"

"No!" he said. "The United Nations had a world corner on this stuff. The Gamecocks must have stolen it. A crime like that wouldn't be permitted to leak out in wartime. A big job! It meant a fortune."

"How much?"

He shrugged his shoulders. "From your description I'd say they must have had four or five hundred pounds. I think the stuff is normally about five hundred dollars a pound—more than

gold. Say it's worth a quarter of a million now. God knows how many millions in cash the Nazis would have put up to keep plane, electrical and oil industries going."

"But how could the Gamecocks and this Nazi—"

"In the wild interior—the Chocó part of Colombia—there's platinum. Natives wash it out of little streams, grain by grain, obediently, and dredges lugged in, in pieces, scoop it up. Washington purchasing agents—the Foreign Economic Administration boys—were right there to buy every color of it. Somehow the Gamecocks must have jumped a consignment and whipped it away in the plane. The Nazi was probably the pilot."

His exultant face suddenly went grim. "D'you see now why Mike Kerrigan made his risky play—and won—though it killed him? He had the lives of thousands—probably the lives of hundreds of thousands of Allied soldiers—in his hands here on this hot little rock! He stopped 'em cold, not by heroic and useless defiance, but by acting the slimy traitor, by worming around on his belly in the dark to dump this stuff over the cliff and shove rocks in its place in those sea-bags and suitcases."

Dot Blaine was scarlet. "Dad didn't know! He didn't! He fought them, too, in his way."

Pete stood up. He was looking back three years to a night when the waters of even tiny, sheltered Cup Bay were leaping in hurricane fury.

"We'll never be sure but I say Mike Kerrigan didn't quit even after he'd gotten rid of that platinum. Maybe they found those rocks when they got the gear down in the cabin. Maybe Mike Kerrigan, with the big job done, simply wouldn't let 'em take over his schooner."

He nodded somberly. "Anyhow, somebody below—and I say it was the old man—got forward to the cabin chain-locker and unshackled the anchor chain. When they paid out more scope on deck as the wind piped up that chain plunged into the sea after the anchor, and the schooner drove ashore."

He paused. "The bitter end of the chain is still in the locker. And doing that job is the only way Mike Kerrigan, unless he was tied down, *could* have died below decks when his ship was bucking a hurricane."

"YES," Dot Blaine said slowly. "Yes." She half smiled and her voice was soothing. "It—it fits the Kerrigan family."

Pete grinned at her briefly and touched the ingot of platinum with the toe of his sneaker.

"The Navy patrols were thick till Germany quit. Even so, I have a

hunch Delgado sneaked back here at least once to make a quick and utterly fruitless search."

"When we got here we found somebody had broken open every locker and possible hiding-place on the schooner," Dot said.

Pete nodded. "Anyhow, later Delgado came snooping around St. Thomas and when he found your father and my father's people were getting together, ostensibly to salvage the *Marie*, he must have suspected a fast one. He'd probably figured there were ways by which Mike Kerrigan could have passed on a clue that night. A note secreted somewhere in his cabin, a bottle tossed through a porthole, a quick word to his mate or one of the hands."

"Dad was very pleased when Delgado offered to charter his sloop so cheaply," Dot Blaine said with bitter irony.

"Joe was the only decent man he had. But when Delgado intercepted me for Dirk he decided he'd have to move faster and rougher. He wrecked his boat getting ashore secretly. He jumped your father anyhow to make him talk and Joe got a knife through the back for interfering."

"Dad wouldn't have talked, not even if he could!"

Pete had trouble in keeping his morose eyes from the chunk of gray metal. "The old man beat Delgado and his Gamecocks to a fare-you-well. But so far Delgado's beaten us—hands down. He talked over that greedy fool Bullen easily enough with a little chatter about treasure. And now he's sitting pretty."

He raised his eyes to the girl. "D'you realize that in about three hours we'll be wanting to trade all the platinum chucked down there at the foot of the cliff—all the platinum in Colombia—for a cup of water?"

Dot Blaine sprang up. "You aren't quit—No! You just mean we've got to get going right away?"

"A mild statement of the case." The sun, Pete saw, was rising hotly over the bank of clouds. A little breeze, precursor of the tradewind, destroyed the mirrorlike smoothness of the lagoon. Already the chalky sediment was stirring on the bottom to spread a veil over the bars of metal that lay scattered on the bottom.

Pete tucked an ingot under each arm.

"We have no time now for treasure hunting," he said. "Let's go."

Together they trudged up over the cliff on the roundabout route to Cup Bay. Already the rock of the old volcano was warm under Pete's wet sneakers, and his shirt was drying on his shoulders. Surreptitiously he ran his thickening tongue over his salty lips. It didn't moisten them much.

CHAPTER TEN

AN hour later Pete and Dot crouched in the shade and privacy of a boulder standing among others in six inches of water on the shore of Cup Bay. They took stock of their enemies.

Bullen's motorboat was anchored in the Bay a hundred yards off Mike Kerrigan's beached schooner. George Blaine was invisible below. So, too, was Delgado, an unpleasing coincidence. But Luis' dark zombie's eyes were turning on the shoreline of the bay, as unfailingly as a revolving light in a beacon, and Bullen was keeping his own watch, mostly eying the beached schooner. In the cockpit in the shade of the wheelhouse top, Bent Nose was sitting, gulping down a glass of water, and the fat man was lifting water in a bucket from over-side and sluicing it over cabin and wheelhouse top to keep down the temperature below.

Five armed enemies, though Bent Nose's bandaged head might mean he was no great asset to Delgado now.

"Call it four and a half against two," Pete muttered. "Can't count in Blaine." Since the wound in his side was still hurting, he had no thought of counting out Dot.

"Shall I shove out this old plank yet?" the girl asked.

PETE studied the height of water on the boulder. He didn't want that plank to be too conspicuous. The tide didn't amount to much but it was rising, lifting a few bits of driftwood, mostly off the *Marie*, from the rocks and sand. Stray gusts of the tradewind, now blowing steadily, came off the cliff and tended to move flotsam toward the sandspit, down to leeward, where an eddy was set up by the current from the inlet.

"Not yet," he said. His throat was dry; he tried to keep his low voice sounding normal. "The sun's got to be stronger. When it rises a little higher Luis won't have a chance to spot us setting it adrift."

He pointed toward the motorboat. "Looking from there up the sunpath on the water will be like sticking hot needles in his eyes."

Dot wasn't asking questions. That helped because Pete's only plan was so risky and uncertain as to be plain silly. He continued to scrape marine slime from one of the bars of platinum, restoring its uniform metallic grayness.

"If we could catch some fish somehow and eat 'em raw it would help," he said. "There's a lot of fresh water in a raw fish."

Dot wriggled her shoulders in distaste.

"I'm not that thirsty yet."

He picked up a handful of wet sand to scrub the bar, then paused, watching the motorboat. Bent Nose had shuffled into the wheelhouse and gone below. Now the short figure of George Blaine, arms still bound, was coming out into the cockpit. Delgado, behind, was urging him along with a gentle hand.

The lean little captive halted in the cockpit, turning resolutely to face the Gamecock.

Delgado spoke to Luis and the fat seaman. Together they closed in suddenly on Blaine. Despite his struggles they held him while Delgado, no longer gentle, tore off his shirt and trousers.

Bullen hovered in the background, watching.

Beside Pete the girl was motionless as a stone.

Together the three men hoisted Blaine up onto the wheelhouse roof. They tied him there, arms and legs spread apart, face upward, in the full beating force of the sun.

From Dot came a little shuddering breath. Pete found himself gripping his automatic, useless at that range. With an effort he opened his fingers and took away his hand.

"That's a mistake," he said, trying to speak with brisk confidence. "It shows Bullen too plainly what his own chances are." He avoided her eyes.

"Yes," Dot whispered. "Yes!"

"And it makes us fight harder, not quit, as he figures. Stand by to shove out the plank. Don't show yourself."

Carefully he placed the cleaned ingot of platinum in the center of the broad plank. He tried to make it seem important to get her mind off that lashed figure in the merciless sun. They held the timber out of sight in the shallow water while Pete stared at the motorboat.

After a single glance around the bay, Delgado had gone below, as if awaiting the results of this subtle maneuver were beneath his dignity. Bullen followed but came up again almost at once. He began fussing about the cockpit, tightening up a hinge on the screen door with a screw-driver, peeping up at the spread-eagled man, putting away the bucket the fat man had used, surveying the shore with sharp eyes, lighting a cigarette and throwing it away.

"Can't keep his hands still," Pete muttered. "Bullen isn't happy."

"No," Dot whispered. "He—he isn't happy."

Pete faced her. "You know there's not enough treasure in the world to save your father—and us—from Delgado now," he said hoarsely.

Dot looked at him gravely. "Yes, I know that. He's gone too far not to be able to go back. It—it's a finish fight."

The waiting was hellish with that white-skinned, almost naked man pinned in the burning sun. Pete gritted his teeth and did nothing—waiting.

At last Bullen's restless fumbling drove the fat man below. But Luis stayed in the wheelhouse on watch, trance-like, with moving eyes. He ignored Bullen.

"Okay," Pete muttered. "Shove out the plank. Careful."

SLOWLY, with gentle touch, Dot pushed the plank out toward deep water. Pete watched Luis. Though he was still vigilant, he gave no sign of having seen the plank. For the most part his eyes were on the schooner and the stretch of shoreline closest to the motorboat.

Crouching together, they waited breathlessly. The plank with the inconspicuous chunk of dull metal balanced on it, drifted idly out into the round little bay. The tidal current bore in on a circular course to the north and west, as Pete had calculated, while wind flurries worked it farther from the curving shore.

If Luis saw, it meant nothing to him. But Bullen, still nervously busy, had a boatman's sharp eye for anything in the water around his boat. Suddenly he stopped dead. The line he was splicing dropped from his hands. He turned his head toward the oblivious Luis, lifting a hand to point. But he changed his mind; his hand came down with surreptitious slowness.

Bullen went into the pilothouse and picked up his binoculars. With casual unconcern he looked through them up at the eastern cliff. Luis glanced at him; then resumed his watch.

Slowly Bullen strolled out into the cockpit, stepped out of sight of Luis and focused his glasses on the plank. His thick body stiffened perceptibly.

"You could put Bullen's whole life into one word," Pete's voice rasped in his excitement. "Greed. He's hooked!"

Dot was hardly breathing.

"If he looks up-sun toward us I'm going to make a sign," Pete said. "His greed will tell him that we've got the stuff; that it's his move."

"You won't trust him, though?"

"Hell, no! But I'll trust his greed, just as Delgado did."

THE plank was floating past the boat, nearer the center of the bay. Bullen had dared no more than a quick glance or two through the glasses but now, laying them down and feigning work on his splice, he was following the drift of the plank out of the corner of his eye. It was headed toward the sandspit.

"He isn't trying to locate us though he must know—" Dot murmured.

"The platinum's blinded him to anything else," Pete answered. "We've got to wait—some more."

George Blaine, motionless on the wheelhouse roof all this time, suddenly made a desperate attempt to turn over, to twist his face out of the sun. It was grotesquely, horribly like the struggles of a gaffed fish in the bottom of a boat. The ropes held him. His furious effort slackened. He lay still again.

The girl was crying softly, head turned away from Pete.

"Steady, Dot!" he whispered. He put a compassionate hand on her shoulder. "Look, Bullen's going after it! We aren't beaten yet. Divide and conquer!"

The motorboat man was pulling the rowboat up alongside. He was trying to be matter of fact, but every move was jerky.

Luis looked at him, then stepped smoothly to the companionway.

Delgado came up at once, brushing Luis aside. He confronted Bullen.

What excuse Bullen made they could not tell. His over-casual wave indicated the sandspit. Delgado shook his head. He put a politely restraining hand on Bullen's arm and kept it there till Bullen, reluctantly, let the rowboat fall back astern.

Delgado, pausing, looked attentively toward the sandspit. His eyes must have picked out the plank instantly for he caught up Bullen's glasses and leveled them. His scrutiny was short.

"He knows what an ingot of platinum looks like," Pete whispered.

Delgado was waving Bullen back into the wheelhouse. His gesture was threateningly brusque. Luis and the fat man, both exhibiting revolvers in response to a command from Delgado, piled into the rowboat and cast off.

The fat man rowed after the plank with clumsy speed.

Delgado swept the round of the bay shore with the glasses, then leaped below and came up with a rifle.

"Dad's," Dot said. "If only we had it!"

Delgado laid the gun on the after deck, pointing toward the sandspit, and caught up the glasses again. With vigilant attention he focused on that gentle, rising beach.

Pete heaved himself up onto his knees. Carefully he fastened the button of his shoulder holster. He took off his shirt and sneakers.

Dot looked up at him. He pulled her farther out of sight behind the big boulder.

"This is the best break we'll get," he said gravely. "Two men away and Delgado figures we're hiding on the seaward slope of the sandspit to ambush the rowboat. He won't be guarding too carefully against direct attack on the motorboat itself."

Dismayed, her eyes surveyed the open sweep of water.

"It's—suicide," she protested.

He took her by both elbows and looked unswervingly into her eyes. "I never felt less like suicide in my life, Dot." His grip tightened for a moment. Then he smiled at her gayly. "Remember the sun-glare on the water. I won't be coming up often."

"It isn't because of Dad's situation?"

"It's because of the Kerrigans," he said sternly. "Stay out of sight. I've got to crawl under water."

She lifted her face and kissed him gravely. "You'll do it!" she said.

He slipped down among the boulders, big and little, that cumbered both shore and shallow bottom, thrust himself under and with eyes wide open clawed along toward deeper water. When he reached the shelter of a giant rock projecting a foot or so from deep water he came up, gulped air and turned to wave reassuringly.

But Dot was gone. He could not see her.

"I've got to get away with this—for her," he whispered.

He faced the bay. The two men in the rowboat were closing up on the plank, well down by the sandspit.

It was a matter of luck. If his luck were out he was an easy target. If not—the fatalism of years of war didn't seem to work—with Dot Blaine in the picture.

But looking across the long stretch he had to make unseen wasn't doing him any good. He pumped oxygen in and out of his lungs, finished off with a deep breath and slid under again. The thin green water sang in his ears. He counted, showing his arms forward and sweeping them back in a vigorous breast stroke.

He came up, gulped air, located the boat and submerged. He swam hard. Once, when his head broke the surface, he heard the voice of a man raised in falsetto, almost hysterical exultation. Maybe Luis or the fat man had his hands on stuff more precious than gold. Pete didn't risk time to look.

Delgado would want to kill him now, not capture him. The Gamecock would reckon the girl would disclose the hiding-place more readily if he were out of the way. They didn't know Dot.

The motorboat got close. But he still wasn't under the shelter of the high bow. The shallow bullet-wound in his side was stinging like hell in the salt water. It must have opened.

He came up, mouth wide and gasping, body cringing in spite of his will—in expectation of a bullet drilling through. The bow loomed up before him and there was no face or gunbarrel peering down from the foredeck.

He swam three silent strokes, and laid hold of the anchor-line. He hung on, breathing and resting. Nice meat for a shark or barracuda loafing in the boat's shadow. And then what would Dot do? A queer, irrational fear, that, when there were three guys with guns waiting for him up above!

He loosened his pistol in the shoulder holster, gripped the thick anchor-line as high as he could reach and started hauling himself out of the water. His bare feet clamped on the line. He climbed.

With his head just below the level of the foredeck he paused to shove his automatic between his teeth. That might save an instant. He gripped the slippery metal tightly in his jaw.

The next second would tell. There was a clear view of the foredeck from the wheelhouse. The first excitement of the platinum find was over. He needed both hands to shift his grip to the deck, scramble aboard and get a footing there. For a bit he would be as vulnerable as a pink rabbit.

It would be almost impossible for vigilant men—for that crafty Delgado of the luminous eyes—not to spot him.

"Get going!" he told himself. He put up a hand over the edge of the foredeck, groping for the line or the bit around which it would be delayed. . . . Now!

A SUDDEN cry like the wail of a banshee ripped through his ears. The wet hair raised on his head. His eyes jerked sidewise even as he moved.

Dot Blaine was standing in full sight over on the rocks near the schooner. Her hands were stretched in supplication toward the motorboat and between them, with frantic strength, she extended the second ingot of platinum. "Water! Water!" she shrielled and tottered forward over the rocks. "Water!"

The platinum thudded to the ground as she made the motion of hurling it toward the boat. She flung herself into the water and flailed madly toward the boat, still screaming.

"The crazy little fool!" Pride thrilled through Pete. He was up on the foredeck, unseen by men held spellbound.

One of his wet feet slipped, making a sound. But already his fingers were reaching for the pistol in his teeth.

His eyes glared into the eyes of Delgado, flicking toward him. Delgado had the cocked rifle in his hands in a lightning grab and whipped it around. Unbelievably catlike—that speed and sureness.

But Pete Kerrigan's gun was a short-barreled automatic, and he wasn't moving slowly himself.

Delgado's bullet through the wind-screen snarled past his ear. But Pete's lead was slashing Delgado's chest when

that happened. Delgado, sagging, did not fire again.

Bullen snatched the rifle from the relaxing hands and pointed it at Delgado's head.

"I got him!" he bellowed. "How much platinum—"

The bandaged Bent Nose, ignored beside Bullen, brought up his thick hand and chopped it down against his neck. Bullen went down as if dead. And Bent Nose's hand, dropping, fumbled for a split second where his knife should have been. Then he grabbed for the revolver that had replaced it. Pete grinned thinly.

Again the wheelhouse glass starred as Pete flattened the big killer with a couple of slugs that shattered his shoulder. Pete charged across the wheelhouse top, over George Blaine's outstretched, twisting body, and dropped into the cockpit.

Delgado was dead, Bullen out and Bent Nose past fighting. Pete shoved pistol and rifle away from Bent Nose with his foot, and looked across the water.

Dot Blaine was swimming in earnest, not splashing, now. He jerked up a hand to her, and then, remembering, whirled aft to see what Luis and the fat man were doing.

The rowboat was still well away but coming up fast under the fat man's powerful swings. Pete reached for the rifle. His first bullet, thudding into the rowboat's planking, set the fat thug spinning the boat and rowing frantically for the beach. Luis pumped his revolver in spite of the range.

"They'll keep," Pete said grimly, touching his dry lips, and set down the gun. He looked again, impatiently, for Dot. She was closer, but he had time to slash off George Blaine's bonds and help the blistered man down into the wheelhouse. He shoved a cup of water into his shaking hands.

"I wouldn't have told him—not even if I had known," Blaine croaked, fixing an unconquered eye on Pete. "I just wanted to salvage that schooner." "I believe it," Pete said. "And I just wanted to salvage a name."

He darted out into the cockpit and was reaching down over the side as Dot drew near. He grabbed her hands and whipped her up over the rail with a quick snap of his long body. He shook her violently.

"You crazy little fool!" he muttered. "Dot! You might have been shot—or dragged under by a—"

"I'm here," she said, laughing at him and trying to breathe. "I can't have anybody—shooting you—but me!"

He stopped shaking her and held her tight.

"We Kerrigans are a stubborn lot—and we'll be worse next generation," he said and kissed her.



"I was meant to be a great artist. The stars say so. And the stars never lie. Marya says so."

Music's Got Charms!

The versatile author of "The Bookshop," "The Magic Staircase" and the Pat Pending stories turns his hand to a carnival comedy.

by NELSON BOND

"**S**PEAKIN' of dates,"—so began Squaredeal Sam McGhee,— "which day of what month was you born on, anyway?" "We weren't," I said; "but March 23."

"March 23, huh? Then you're an 'Aries.' I should of knew—'Aries' folks is always big-hearted, generous to friends in need, willin' to help a guy out in a jam."

I chuckled. More than a year had gone by since the old promoter, con and carny man had parked his battered derby on my desk-top, but time had not withered, nor custom staled, the infinite variety of his preludes to

a touch. I nodded at my depleted humidor.

"Have one," I said, "and make yourself comfortable. Take *more* than one, and I'll break your arm."

"You author guys," sighed Sam, "are all alike. You suck a pal's brains dry, then begrudge him a lousy cigar or a snort of wartime fusel-oil for a story you make a fortune on! I'd rather take a lickin' than be an editor. Talk about your thankless jobs! An editor gets holt of a new writer—nurses him through his learnin' period, teaches him how to plot an' tell a story so it makes sense—an' then what do you think happens?"

"The editor gets better stories," I said promptly.

"In a pig's ear!" said Sam. "If he's lucky, he only gets gray hair. If he's unlucky, he gets ulcers too. Under any circumstances, he gets it in the neck. The guy he turned into a writer sells out to either Hollywood or the radio, an' the editor has to start all over again with *another* dumb hopeful."

"You talk," I said, "as if you'd had experience."

"Sure! I've had dealin's with you prima donnas. I been an impresario myself. Not in the authorin' racket, but all you creative guys is alike."

Like, for instance, you take modern art—"

"I wouldn't touch it with a ten-foot pole," I said. "But aren't you getting off the subject, Sam? You started to say something about astrology. When did you become a convert to the science of the stars in their courses?"

"Well," parried Sam delicately, "it's a long story. An' I got to raise a small sum this afternoon. So p'raps we shouldn't ought to waste each other's time?"

"Give," I told him, "and I'll do likewise."

Sam grinned and settled comfortably into his chair.

"I reckon," he said, "it was Len Tyler that started it. Him an' that Gypsy gal."

"Started *what*? Your interest in astrology, or your career as an impresario?"

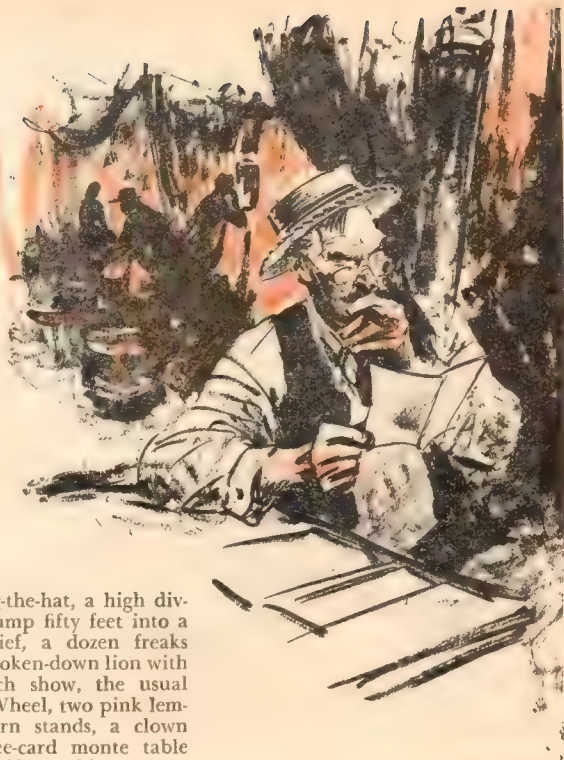
"Both," said Sam. "Both. Like the worm said when he met hisself comin' around a corner, it's all part of the same tale."

THIS Len Tyler (began Squaredeal Sam) come to me in the summer of '40—before the war, if you can recollect back that far. I was in the carny racket that year, half owner of a real outdoor show with sixteen concessions:

Slide-the-pig, ring-the-hat, a high diver which could jump fifty feet into a damp handkerchief, a dozen freaks under canvas, a broken-down lion with halitosis, a kootch show, the usual Whip an' Ferris Wheel, two pink lemonade an' popcorn stands, a clown band, an' a three-card monte table which I run myself at odd moments



Len was a natural-born carny man. He could bark a yardful of rubes up a blind alley.



or when the help hollered too loud for back pay—and several others.

The kid had nothin' but an over-sized grin, a letter from an uncle I knowed once—him an' me sold *Dr. Rainwater's Patent Panacea for Pale and Puny People*, till we ran short of rainwater in Alamota, Kansas—an' a yen to be somebody.

"I don't care where you use me, Mr. McGhee," smiled the kid. "I'll do anything to learn the business. I'll work for my board and keep, even."

There was something about him I liked. His grin or his voice, maybe. Or maybe the salary he didn't ask for.

"Okay, son," I said. "You're hired. As to workin' for free—no soap! Squaredeal Sam McGhee don't operate like that. You get your board an' your keep, an' five bucks a week to squander any way you please."

So Len Tyler hit the road with us, an' it wasn't no time before I seen he was a natural-born carny man. He could bark a yardful of rubes up a blind alley with that pleasant, persuasive voice of his. What's more important, he could ease 'em out again, to make room for the next batch of goons, before the India-rubber man's skin slapped back in place.

By June he was my number one holler-man. The first week in July,



"I don't care where you use me, Mr. McGhee," said the kid, "I'll do anything to learn the business."

I took him into the cash-wagon as my assistant. Come August, I was considerin' addin' a three-ring equestrian an' flyin'-trapeze show, an' makin' Len ringmaster. But like Bobby Burns, the Arkansaw poet, says: "The best-laid plans of mice an' men often gang up on a guy." Before I got around to doin' all these things, Fate stepped in.

WE was openin' in one of them Midwestern tank-towns one day, when all of a sudden we heard a great jinglin' an' a janglin' outside the cash-wagon. We looked out. There, bold as brass, was a caravan of Gypsies prancin' onto our lot.

"Look, Sam!" yelled Len. "Gypsies! Good luck!"

"Good luck, your Aunt Sophy!" I said. "I never seen a Gypsy yet that wouldn't steal the spigots off'n a milch cow! Go tell 'em to scram!"

But Len had skedaddled, just like a big kid, to see the newcomers. I slipped on my coat an' followed him.

It wasn't much of a caravan. Just the Gypsy chief, his woman, a few strappin' big sons with grins that stretched from ear to there, some females that must of been their wives—

a mess of nigh-naked little Gypsyettes, bawlin' an' screamin' an' gettin' in everybody's way. An' the gal. The main attraction: Marya!

Every once in a while you see a Gypsy gal that makes you think them archeologists are right when they tell you the Gypsies are descendants of the original Egyptians. This here Marya was one of the Q.E.D's. Slender an' supple as a willow tree, she was. Warm an' alive like a spring wind. She had a skin the color of sunshine an' hair like a summer midnight. An' if I'm talkin' like a poet, remember that even an old goat like me was a kid once. An' I was five years younger then. . . .

The boss Gypsy—by name of Vralow, I learned later—was tryin' to talk to Len. But Len wasn't even lookin' at him, much less listenin'. His eyes was all for Marya—which bein' of the female gender she knew perfectly well if she *did* pretend like she didn't notice. So Vralow turned to me.

"A thousand greetings, brother!" he said.

"An' one good-by!" I told him. "This here property is leased. So scram!"

"But we wish to join your troupe."

"Yeah!" I said. "What do you do?"

"I do nothing," said the old boy haughtily. "I am the father-chief. But my sons are acrobats, jugglers, horsemen—whatever you desire. And my daughter Marya is a teller of the stars. She reads the past, the present, the future."

I caught a glimpse of Len's eyes then, an' they was pleadin' with me to let the gang stay. I hesitated—an' you know what happens to he who?

"You'll pay rent for your concessions?" I asked.

"But naturally," smiled Vralow. So him an' me went off to one side an' closed the deal. By the time we was done, Len an' Marya had found their tongues an' was clubbier than a rural party-line. Len was obviously ready, willin' an' able to hang around the caravan the rest of the afternoon. But he dragged himself away when I called.

On the way back to the wagon, he said: "Now, there's what I call a remarkable girl, Sam."

"I seen you remarkin' her," I said.

"I'm to see her again tonight," he sighed. "Do you know what we're going to do?"

"Probably," I said. "And I warn you right now—"

"She's going to read my future in the stars. Think of that, Sam!"

"Yeah," I told him gloomily, "an' so can I. At the rate you're goin' now, I see snowfalls an' blizzards ahead!"

Len stared at me. "Snow? In July? Impossible!"

"Nevertheless, I see you goin' for a sleighride."

Sam paused and scrubbed his lips with the back of a knotty fist.

"Funny," he commented, "how conversation dries up a guy's throat."

I said, "There's water in the carafe."

Sam looked horrified.

"Water! You're kiddin'! Aint you never seen what that stuff does to the inside of rain-pipes?"

"Now," he hinted, "if you was to have handy just a couple or six ounces of snake-bite remedy, in case I should meet up with a cobra in the next—"

I grinned and passed him the bottle. As he sniffed it appreciatively, I voiced my disappointment.

"Sam," I said, "this sounds like a love-story. You started to tell me about your belief in—"

"Impatience," sighed the old carny man, "was always one of your worst faults. I just been layin' the background. The real story starts that night, when the kid come back from havin' his stars gazed at."

LEN busted into the wagon (continued) Sam, his eyes bugged out like asparagus stalks with pupils.

"Sam," he said, "what do you know about astrology?"

"Like a seaman's bed," I told him, "it's the bunk!"

"Wrong!" yelled Len. "Marya's just been reading my horoscope. I'm a genius, Sam! It turns out I was born under the sign of Sagittarius. That's the symbol of great artistic ability. What's more, with Saturn in the ascendant and Venus in opposition—"

"Hold everything, kid!" I interrupted. "Sanitarium an' Venice don't mean a thing to me. What's the pitch?"

"Simply this, Sam," said the kid seriously. "I was meant to be a great artist. The stars say so. And the stars never lie. Marya says so."

"That gives the stars a clean bill of health," I conceded. "But how about Marya? Now, calm down, kid," I added hastily as he started clouding up around the eyebrows. "I'll listen."

"Can't you see, Sam? I have no talent for painting or writing. Still, I'm the creative type. So that leaves me just one field—"

"Keep it clean," I said.

"Sam," breathed the kid, "I'm a singer!"

"Now, look, son," I said gently, "when a guy begins to think he's a sewing-machine, it's time to—"

"Music! Music, Sam! I'm a great singer! And just think—I never even guessed it! Sam," he said fiercely, "start me on the highway to fame!"

"That highway's got detours," I warned him, "not to mention soft shoulders. But where do I figger in?"

"BEFORE I can sing before a large audience like the Met or Carnegie Hall," frowned the kid, "I've got to practice before a small one. Learn how to overcome stagefright. Find out what kind of songs to sing. This carnival is the perfect place to experiment."

"You mean you want to give a recital in a tent?"

"That's it, Sam. Are you game?"

"I'm game enough," I said. "But I'm out of season. No go, son! Freak-shows an' squeak-shows don't mix."

"But the stars!" wailed Len. "Pluto and Uranus are in conjunction. There'll never be a more favorable time."

"Pluto!" I snorted. "Uranus! You can't do it! Now go to bed before I give you some more stars to gaze at!"

Well, I got what you might call a granite will, but Len Tyler was a chiseler from 'way back. Him an' Marya kept seein' each other through the followin' weeks. An' what with him wantin' to be a ham, an' her egg-in' him on, I felt like a ham-an'-egg sandwich.

He nagged me through Nebraska, coaxed me in Kansas, an' gave me the misery in Missouri. Slowly he busted down my reserve till one day—utterly



*Illustrated
by John
Fulton*

ill in Illinois—I said okay. He was as tickled as an old maid in flannel snuggies. When I finally got him brushed out of my hair, he rushed off to tell Marya, who'd appointed herself his trainer, inspirer an' cryin'-towel, an' they started layin' plans for him to slaughter an unsuspectin' audience.

The experiment was set for a little burg in western Indiana. Len's nerves began tightenin' up on him about three days before the event. By the night of the Big Adventure, he was throbbin' like a sore tooth in a fudge sundae.

"Is everything set, Sam?" he asked me in the wagon.

"Everything," I nodded, "but you. Sure you want to go through with this?"

"I've got to," he said grimly. "The stars say that my future success lies in my voice. Fame and wealth—"

"Okay. But since you're so jittery, why not put it off—give yourself a chance to calm down for—oh, say a couple of decades?"

Len shook his head.



The boss Gypsy was tryin' to talk to Len. But Len wasn't even lookin' at him. His eyes were all for Marya.

"No, Sam. It's now or never. The stars are propitious, and opportunity only knocks once—"

Something went *bump!* on the door, an' the two of us jumped. I said: "That must be him now."

But our visitors was two strangers. One was a big red-faced country cop; the other was a nice-lookin' man about middle age that seemed sort of embarrassed.

"Your name McGhee?" growled the Sheriff.

"That," I said cautiously, "depends. What's up?"

"I'm the Sheriff of this county, and this gentleman is Mr. Preston Forsythe, one of our wealthiest citizens.

His farm is next to this lot. We want to search your grounds and equipment. And," he added, "you might as well say yes, on account of I've got a search warrant in my pocket, anyway."

"IN that case," I told him, "you got my permission. But what are you looking for?"

"I'm sorry to disturb you, Mr. McGhee," interrupted Forsythe apologetically, "but a valuable piece of property is—er—missing from my farm. We have reason to suspect that someone connected with your show may be responsible."

"Missing? You mean *stole*? What's been lifted?"

"I raise blooded stock," explained Forsythe. "This evening a prize-winning Berkshire hog—er—disappeared from its pen shortly after feeding-time. One of my hands tells me he saw a swarthy stranger loitering around the fence, so—"

"Swarthy stranger!" I said. "Len—hear that? The Gypsies! I knew I never should have let them join us!"

"Nonsense!" snapped Len. "Vra-low's sons wouldn't touch a thing that didn't belong to them!"

"Or wasn't fastened down," I added. "Well, we'll soon find out. Come with me, gentlemen. I'll—"

"Wait a minute!" said Len, shovin' hisself between us an' the door. His eyes was hot as a political debate, an' there was little streaks of white gristle in his jaw. "You can't deliberately insult my friends by accusing them of a thing like this, Sam!"

"I don't know whether I can insult them or not," I admitted, "but I can sure as hell accuse them. Gypsies are Gypsies, the world over, an'—"

"And what, Mr. McGhee?" inquired a cool voice. In the doorway behind Len stood Marya.

"Marya," I said, "there's been a theft. Somebody's stole a prize Berkshire hog. An' these gentlemen think your folks had somethin' to do with it."



If humans didn't go for Len's voice, something else did. Animals! It took us an hour to clear the animals out of the tent.

"The gentlemen," said Marya coolly, "are mistaken. My people do not steal. Come, Len! It's time now for your act."

SHE took his hand, an' without another word the two of them left the wagon. I started after them, but Forsythe stopped me.

"Please, Mr. McGhee. There's a possibility the girl is telling the truth. Suppose we wait until after the show?"

"Well," I admitted, "I *did* sort of want to hear the kid make his dayboo."

So we went down to the tent.

Since there wasn't no admission

charge to listen to the kid's yodelin', a considerable crowd was there—one more proof that in this life you get exactly what you pay for. We got there just as Len walked out on the platform. His gills was the least bit greenish, an' his knees sort of wobbled as he walked. But he nodded to the piano-player—an' he was off!

Sam paused, shaking his head in doleful reminiscence.

"Well?" I prodded. "Was he good?"

The old showman looked at me reproachfully.

"I *said* he was off, didn't I? I wasn't kiddin'!"

TO just say that Len was awful (said Sam mournfully), would be assault an' battery on the English language. Though to tell the truth, I don't think the words that describe how bad he *was* has been invented yet.

Len's voice had *body*, all right. No one could deny *that*. It was about as soft an' gentle as the matin'-call of a steam calliope. Just one loud, gruesome lungful of noise that filled the tent, overflowed out onto the Midway, an' then leaked off into the surrounding countryside for a mile an' a half.

I can prove that. The workers in a war plant that far away laid down



their tools an' went home, thinkin' their shift had ended. In them days they called 'em defense factories—but there wasn't no defense against Len's attack.

Except flight. An' that's what the audience did as fast as their legs could carry them. We was at the very back of the tent, which was a mean spot to be in. My heirs come mighty close to collectin' my insurance that night. Double indemnity, too.

But if humans didn't go for Len's voice, something else did. Animals! With the first blat out of the kid come

an answerin' bellow from the menagerie scattered through the lot. The lion started roarin': the horses whinnied; an assortment of stray cats come tumblin' into the tent, spittin' an' meowin' like they'd discovered a field full of catnip.

"All the sounds of nature meet—" warbled the kid, an' half the sounds of nature joined in the chorus. What was left of the audience was bent double at the sight of Len, up there on the stage, desperately tryin' to sing an' at the same time scrape off a blanket of affectionate Fidos an' felines.

"I luh-hooove you!" squalled Len, shruggin' an' enamored rooster off his shoulder, an' sendin' the crowd into a fresh convulsion.

I groaned an' started for the platform to get him out of there. But just then the popeyed Sheriff grabbed my arm. "Look!" he bawled over the racket. "Over there!"

A big black bristly pig was waddlin' up the aisle. He clambered up the steps an' nuzzled hisself against Len's legs, snufflin' an' gruntin', happy as a hog can be!

Forsythe choked, an' his eyes widened.

"Amazing!" he stammered. "Incredible! Why, that's my hog! Let me through, please!" An' he started pushin' his way through the crowd up to the stage, where Len was doggedly finishin' his first an' last public solo.

Len had only sung for about three minutes. But it took us an hour to clear the animals out of the tent.

"So," shrugged Squaredeal Sam, "now you see what I mean about artists. A bunch of selfish, ungrateful crackpots. You give 'em a start in life, an' where does it get you—in the end?"

"Now, see here, Sam," I said sternly, "if you think you can stop halfway through your story—"

"These wartime cigars," fretted Sam, frowning at a gnawed butt, "don't last hardly no time. You don't mind if I have another? Thanks!"

I winced as he tucked a handful into his vest.

"I still say," I protested weakly, "you've left me in midair. Where did the pig come from? What about Marya? And the stars? And how about Len? Wasn't he disappointed?"

"The pig?" repeated Sam. "Oh, he'd never been stole. He'd just wandered out of his pen. But Len an' Marya—"

He fumbled in his coat pocket and drew forth a snapshot of a tall young man beaming affectionately upon a slim, dark-haired girl and a baby.

"This is them," said Sam. "Sure, they got married. Why not? Her stars told the truth, after all. They said his future was in his voice—an' they was right. After Forsythe give Len a job, the kid become right famous in his line."

I stared at him dazedly. "What? But his singing was a horrible failure, you said. So the stars were wrong!"

Sam didn't hear me. Still engrossed in the picture, he chuckled: "See the baby? Cute trick, aint he? An' guess what they named him? Samuel—after me! An' boy! Can that kid holler!"

Squaredeal Sam beamed proudly.

"You know," he said, "I bet some day that youngster will be even a better champeen hog-caller than his old man!"

The Point of No

As told to Lester S. Kafer, Jr. by

WE took our combat training at Charleston. They gave us a brand new B-24 heavy bomber at Mitchell Field, and on July 26, we flew to the Bangor, Maine, aerial port of embarkation. A couple of days later we hopped off about eleven A. M. While we were loading our luggage aboard ship, one of the guys wanted to stow away a motorcycle he had swiped, but was persuaded to leave it behind.

We flew to Gander, Newfoundland, and the field there was so immense I thought all the airplanes in the world must be stacked around it. There were runways so big you could land sidewise, and so many planes you had to wait your turn to leave.

It was eight days before we got off. We lifted from one of those dream-world runways an hour before midnight, and headed for the Azores. Over Lagens at nine the next morning there were so many planes we had to wait forty minutes to land. They had only one strip, a metal job that made a hell of a noise when your wheels hit.

As we rolled in, the valve on our nose-wheel tucked under and let the air out of the tire, which didn't do the inner tube any good. The Army won't let you repair an inner tube; you have to get a new one. Since the nearest was at Akron, Ohio, we were stuck.

There was a nice beach and a sort of quaint community. Every morning the Air Transport Command would put lunches in the plane, expecting us to be leaving. I'd send one of the enlisted men to the field to relieve the guard; he'd bring back the ten lunchboxes and we'd have a picnic. The local wine was good, and all in all we had a very pleasant time there.

Finally the ATC flew an inner tube in, and we moved to Marrakech in French Morocco, where we spent a night, and then to a spot near Tunis from where we were directed to a sub-depot in southern Italy to get a couple of our radios modified for combat use. At Gioia, where we got our permanent assignment, we lived in the plane about three days. We slept under the wings, and because the food was pretty bad, we ate K rations. We'd start the putput and turn on the radio, burn the lights and read and write in-

side the plane. It was much better than living in a tent.

We got our assignment and reported to the 460th Bomb Group near Spinzola—and lost our brand-new plane. The policy there, as everywhere, was to give new pilots the old ships, so we had to take what came along. It was during a lot of briefing and lectures there that the Flight Surgeon defined our job. Besides giving me my place in the scheme of war, he warned against letting anybody "goof off" on a mission.

"Everybody's going to be scared," he said. "Everybody from the Colonel on down is scared. It manifests itself in different ways. One fellow will get sick and not be able to keep down his breakfast; another will try to hide from flak by covering his head like an ostrich, and some will want to jump out. Frankly, we don't give a damn about you as an individual. We have a job to do—to get our bombs on the target."

I flew my first mission as co-pilot with an experienced crew, and our navigator went along in another ship. Just as we took off, the Tower called frantically: "Ship on fire! Get the hell out! Ship on fire! Get the hell out!" I looked down and saw the flames right on the runway—it just looked awful—and I asked the engineer to check which ship was missing from formation. He came back and pointed on the "flimsy," showing relative positions of the ships, to the plane our navigator was riding. I started framing the letter I was going to write to his wife. Half an hour later I looked up, and there was his ship sitting there on our wing; the engineer had been wrong.

We learned later that everyone in the flaming wreck had got out at two hundred feet. Only the pilot was injured; he broke his leg. It took a lot of guts for him to hold that ship in position while the others jumped. It was flaming from end to end, and carrying six thousand pounds of high, very high, explosives.

That mission—pretty long—was to Pardubice, an oil refinery. We hit the target, and about fifty ME-109s hit us. Our group gathered together like

chicks around a hen; we had a formation you couldn't get a bumblebee through, and the fighters left us alone. Instead, they picked on a group next to us. I saw one B-24 that in one second looked like an orange-crate on fire. They knocked down six bombers, and we got nine Messerschmitts. Our fighter cover nursed the rest home.

Our top fighter cover was a story by itself. A crack Negro squadron, it was made up of boys who flew as though the wings and tail surfaces were extensions of their arms and legs. Many of their race were born to dance, and in much the same way these lads were born to fly.

THE first mission we flew as a crew was to Brenner Pass. For eight it was first exposure to enemy fire. The engineer, a country boy from North Carolina, was at his station in the upper turret behind the pilot, where he stayed on hand to check fuel or make quick repairs—there couldn't be any other kind. We were just about over the target, and he was looking for enemy planes when a piece of flak took the top off the turret and shattered his rear-view mirror.

He jumped down from the turret and hollered: "God damn it, Lieutenant, somebody's gonna get killed!" I told him to crawl up inside his flak-helmet and he'd be all right. Later he claimed he was the only guy in the world who could completely immerse himself in a flak-helmet.

The ship was shot up a little, but we got home without any trouble. One thing that there's no way to describe, something no one ever will know until he has done it, is the feeling that goes through you when you get down to the end of the runway after a mission and turn on to the taxi-strip. I've never known such a satisfactory sensation—nothing else can touch it. Then the mission is over; but not until then.

You taxi back to your hardstand; and the ground-crews-wave, and you wave back, and you feel like pretty big stuff up there. Then everyone gets out of the plane, and you start giggling, laughing and poking fun at each other. You go in and get a shot

Return

SAM HOUSTON NORTHCROSS

There is a point beyond which a bomber cannot go—and get back again. The first time this fortress risked it, the crew bailed out and got back through Yugoslavia on foot. The second time, they became prisoners of war in Germany.

of liquor; that's the first thing, and the Flight Surgeon has it ready. Then come Red Cross coffee and doughnuts, and finally, interrogation.

You munch doughnuts and sluice down coffee while the interrogator asks about the target and where the bombs fell. Nobody ever sees where anyone else's bombs hit. Your ball-turret gunner, who's in the best position to see, points to the middle of the target. That's always the way. Your bombs always hit dead center. . . .

Our second target was a railroad bridge somewhere in northern Italy. We got back from that one without anything untoward happening. Maybe this flying stuff wasn't so bad, we thought. Forty-eight more missions, and they'd give us a vacation!

About four o'clock the morning of August 27, our waker-upper came around. You knew he was going to wake you, and you were awake for hours, knowing he was coming. He had a wonderful bedside manner; I think he was picked because of it. In a prayer-book voice he would say: "Lieutenant, it's time." He then would read off to the navigator the list of sectional maps you'd use that day; that was the first you learned where you were going. It was a terrible feeling. You sat in the darkness and listened, and you knew whether the news that night was going to be good or bad.

ON the twenty-seventh the destination was Blechhammer. It was a nasty target, ringed with anti-aircraft defenses, and we used to call it "Flakhammer." It was a ten-hour haul; and even if you didn't get hit, you had to sweat out your gas to get back. In aerial navigation there's a term "point of no return"—a point in space beyond which you can't go and return to the place from which you started. Blechhammer was just about it for us.

We made it out and got on the target. That's the worst part, sitting there. You have to keep your formation together to give a good bomb pattern. You're level, and you can see the flak, and you know you're going to run into it. The temptation is terrible to head away and go around the spot where it's bursting. If you were

up there by yourself, that's probably what you'd do; but with all those other guys around, you suddenly find a lot of guts, which you don't really have but which you manufacture on the spur of the moment. I never saw anybody shy away from the target.

About thirty seconds from the target our ship jumped, and it felt as though the bombs had gone. I started raising hell with the bombardier for dropping too soon, and he said: "I haven't dropped anything." The flak had burst right under us and bounced the ship.

Then the bombs did go away, and all hell broke loose. Everything went wrong; we were at twenty thousand feet, and impossible things began to happen. With one engine shot-up, we feathered the prop and managed to stay with the formation ten minutes and get away from the target-area. Another engine began to act up, and the co-pilot started flying the ship while I pushed buttons and pulled switches like an old-time movie-theater organist during a Wild West sequence. I did every damn' thing I could think of—everything in the book, and then I made up a few things.

We couldn't get the bomb-bay doors closed, and they created a big drag. We had one engine out altogether, another acting very peculiarly, and two on which we couldn't reduce the R.P.M. at all. They were going full speed, just wouldn't slow down, and the manifold pressure was wabbling back and forth. The engineer and bombardier finally got one door shut, but the cable was cut on the other.

We were losing altitude rapidly, and it became pretty obvious we were going to have to lighten ship, so we started throwing out radios. There are fourteen radios in a B-24, and you can get rid of quite a lot of weight by chucking them out. We threw out the flak suits and a bag I had full of heavy flying-suits.

Then we had to reach a decision about the guns. If we threw them out and were jumped by fighters, we didn't have a chance; if we didn't throw them out, it looked as though we weren't going to make it home. There were ten .50-caliber machine-gun bar-

rels and four thousand pounds of ammunition. Fifty-caliber ammunition weighs a lot.

The tail-gunner asked: "Do you mind if I shoot mine instead of throwing it?" I said O.K., and he had a big time firing away. We tossed out the machine-gun belts and then extra clothing; everything that weighed anything we threw out of the ship. Once down where we no longer needed oxygen, we threw away oxygen masks.

WE got by pretty well on two engines for three hours, although we had some anxious moments when we crossed a field in Hungary loaded with ME-109s. For some reason, they didn't come up after us. Heading for the Island of Vis, a British controlled emergency airstrip in the Adriatic near the coast of Yugoslavia, we were within sight of the coast when there was a sudden awkward silence. All four fans had stopped turning—and playing the organ didn't do any good.

The ship was dropping fast, and I decided that when the indicator showed five thousand feet, we'd better bail out, because our altimeter was set for sea-level, and we were over mountainous territory. There was a little green valley right below, and I started circling so we'd land close together and have a better chance of getting out. I gave the word to jump.

I wasn't going to stay around there too long, so when I thought everybody was out, I cut the switches, rolled the trim tabs back to keep the ship level and got up to leave. I looked into the navigator's dome—and there was Dan with his head in the dome shooting a fix—the intercom had been torn out when we jettisoned the radios, and he hadn't heard the order to jump. I yelled: "You so-and-so, get out of there!"

I held the ship a moment more, and he jumped out the nose-wheel door. Then I just turned around and dived through the open bomb-bay door. As soon as I cleared the ship I pulled my ripcord, and just about the time the chute opened I hit the ground. I bounced.

Gathering my chute, I looked up and saw a kid about twelve years old running toward me. We had been briefed about the Partisans in Yugo-

slavia, so I yelled "*Partisani!*" and he grinned and nodded. I said "*Americani!*" and he continued to grin from ear to ear and nod violently.

The boy rushed over to help pick up my parachute, followed by two old women who embraced me while tears flooded their eyes. I tried to tell them I was all right, but they insisted on feeling me for broken bones and bruises. Together we started to walk across the field, and a crowd began to materialize. Blackjack, our ball-turret gunner, picked himself up from behind a rock about fifty yards away, where he had been hiding to see what would happen. My first sensation was immense relief to be rid of that ornery airplane.

We met a Partisan major who spoke French. We had been flying so long I was tired and thirsty, so I asked this Major in high-school French if we could have some water. He said, "Most certainly; come right along this way," and we walked down to a small village—more like a farm: four or five dwellings in a small square.

The place was packed with an admiring throng of natives, who brought us bunches and bunches of grapes. An old man, evidently the proprietor, came with an enormous bottle of the local whisky, Rochquila. I had a swig of that, and then I wanted water worse than ever. Hospitality, however, required me to have another shot. After the third I decided life wasn't so bad after all; maybe I should stay there—I didn't like flying, anyway.

The Major said he had counted ten 'chutes, so the whole crew must have landed in the valley. He said there was an enemy garrison about a mile and a half from where we bailed out. My nerves started twitching, and I suggested we get the hell into hiding, but the Major said not to worry; sentries had been posted to give us plenty of warning, and we must have refreshment before starting our journey. I said we'd like to get back to Italy, and the Major assured: "That's all right, we'll take you back to Italy."

I asked, "How long?" and he replied: "Oh, it's a matter of a few days." So I said: "That's fine; let's have another drink of Rochquila."

I DON'T know where the people came from; there was a tremendous throng in the village, women and children, old men and a few Partisan soldiers. We went into the proprietor's house and had some eggs, and of course Rochquila, and while we were there, they brought in all but two of our crew members. Two fellows who showed up had to be carried, one with a broken bone in his foot, and the navigator with a very badly sprained ankle. The latter was heavily built, and his ankle looked as

though it had been taken off a Steinway.

With them came the most dashing figure I've ever seen, a Partisan captain, shade of Douglas Fairbanks. Handsome, with big black mustache and black flashing eyes, he carried some sixteen hand grenades strapped around his waist, two pistols and a knife. Open-shirted, tanned and virile, he wore riding-boots, but he had given his big white horse to our navigator.

About seven that night we started walking. The first place we hit was a village about six miles from our starting place. There was a reception committee, and my first inclination when I saw all the people was to head for the bushes. But the Major, our guide and mentor throughout the trip, reassured: "Don't worry; they are our people."

In we rode, and the way they looked at us, you'd have thought we were heroes instead of eight dopes. Everybody was cheering and anxious to do something for us; they fed us fruit, cheese, goat's meat, bread and lots of new wine. The co-pilot got silly drunk.

After about an hour's rest we moved on, walking until one A.M. when we reached the house of the One-Eyed Man. The Yugoslavs divided their defenses into districts with a chieftain in charge of each division. We were handed from one to the next, and each chieftain provided at least two horses and an adequate armed guard; only the swashbuckling Captain and the Major stayed with us the whole trip.

The One-Eyed Man was a local hero about twenty years old. He held the post of guerrilla chieftain for that district by virtue of having killed more Germans than anyone else in the area. He was really a rough customer, but very pleasant to us. Having got up at four the morning before and had a strenuous day, we were dead tired. It was after midnight, and everybody wanted to go to bed, but we had to sit around and wait for the One-Eyed Man to welcome us with food and Rochquila.

We were sitting around with our eyelids flapping on our cheeks when I suggested we were tired and would like to turn in. After we had done justice to One-Eye's hospitality (they were very sensitive about the amenities), they put the eight of us in a room with straw on the floor, and we were asleep before our hosts were out of earshot.

After a good wash in the morning we were very much refreshed, and it was a beautiful day. The view was gorgeous, broken only by a barnhouse with thirty or forty tough-looking bandits sitting around sunning themselves, sharpening knives and clean-

ing guns, while women rushed about working and plowing the fields.

I noticed a little kid about eight years old with a gun twice as long as he was tall, and hand grenades strapped to his belt. I thought he was playing soldier with his father's equipment; it turned out he had ten Germans to his credit. He was an active member of the Partisan Army, and I found later this was not at all extraordinary, for everybody that walked in that country was at war, actively at war, with the Germans.

Our ball-turret boy, who had been a trick shot in a circus, always carried a pearl-handled .32-caliber pistol, and there wasn't enough money anywhere to buy it from him. This little kid came up, and not being able to speak a word of English, he just looked at the pearl handle and held out his hand. The gunner gave it to him. The kid examined the pistol, stuck it in his pocket and grinned. The gunner told him to keep it. Later, he said that if the kid had been able to speak English and had asked for the gun, he'd probably have popped him on the head. But, he explained, "It was just the way he looked at me." That lad was the proudest boy in Yugoslavia, and sensible too—he came back to get some ammunition to fit the gun.

We spent the day in that section of the hills, and at nightfall started out again over the mountains—never any trail, no road, nothing. How we navigated I'll never know, though we were favored by a pretty good moon. Every now and then we'd stop, and the Major would come back along the line and tell us not to smoke. After fifteen or twenty minutes there'd be a little shadowy movement up ahead, someone would come back and report to the Major, and we'd move on.

THOUGH we were within a few hundred yards of German patrols, we never worried because the fellows escorting us were so extremely confident. They knew where every German in the country was at any time of day or night; and when they said, "Wait here a few moments and make yourselves comfortable," why, we were comfortable.

We reached a corps headquarters and found the members of our crew, bombardier and radio operator, who had been missing for two days. We also found a chap who spoke English, which was a great relief to me. We were bedded down in a hut apparently reserved for distinguished guests, where they had a field telephone captured from the Germans. To generate power, they had a fellow sit in something that looked like a lawn chair with a bicycle pedal, and pump away. The phone was in our bed-

room, and at intervals during the night somebody would run in and shout Croatian gibberish into the mouthpiece in a voice so loud he didn't need any help from Alexander G. Bell. We'd groan and roll over.

NEXT day our hosts organized a sightseeing party for us. The Partisan lieutenant who spoke English had captured singlehanded a German tank which originally had been taken from the Italians. The Lieutenant had climbed aboard, pointed two pistols at the driver's head, and by foot-signals brought tank and driver home. How they got the tank into those mountains, though, I'll never know. They had a little meadow about the size of a dining-room, and they ran this tank around and around like an electric train on the dining-room carpet. A Partisan colonel at corps headquarters who had a camera took pictures of us posed on the tank with the German driver.

Then we inspected the tent area for some twenty-three hundred soldiers. They had hundreds and hundreds of machine-gun belts, all American aircraft .50 caliber, and twenty-five or thirty .50-caliber machine-gun barrels, many twisted like hairpins. They were trying to make some use of this stuff; and our gunners, whom I put to work helping assemble parts from different pieces, had a lot of fun playing around with the Partisan gunners.

The co-pilot, navigator and I went over to look at a site the Lieutenant said he thought would make an excellent emergency landing-field and save the Allies from losing so many planes in Yugoslavia. We looked it over, and sure enough, there was a good two thousand yards that needed almost no grading, a very thin film of grass over hard, flaky rock on which you could land in almost any weather. We outlined a runway with white rocks, put up a windsock, and named the field "Lizzie's Roost."

While we were standing there talking, a lone B-24 came over the mountain, very low, all four fans turning. Everything seemed perfectly normal, but it must have been in some kind of difficulty. The Partisans started firing rockets into the air, and I remembered that when we were in trouble I had seen rockets coming up and hadn't known what they meant; they were trying to signal that this was friendly territory and the place to bail out. Nobody in the Fifteenth Air Force had told us about that.

The plane paid no attention to the rockets, and about five miles farther on, the nose went up, she fell into a spin and crashed. It took most of the day to get over there; and when I walked up to the wreck, I hated to

look in, because I knew what I'd find—no parachute had blossomed before the crash.

There was no one in the waist, so I figured the crew had bailed out earlier. Thinking the pilot must be up front, I entered the flight deck. It was a ghost ship, not a soul aboard! Apparently they had bailed out—no knowing how far back or for what reason—and the ship had been flying on automatic pilot when the gas ran out. We discussed the cost of a B-24, and when the Lieutenant translated my estimate of \$225,000 into Yugoslavian currency one man beat his head and muttered: "My God, it can't be!"

Tito's men always were anxious to do anything they could to help our cause. After the mystery ship crashed, we had returned to the corps headquarters farmhouse and held a sort of staff meeting. They had a map of Yugoslavia, and the Lieutenant pointed to several locations and said: "Here's German ammunition; there's a railroad that carries all the supplies to the German garrison—cut that railroad bridge, and they starve. How about bombing it for us?" I said sure, we'd bomb it. The place was called Omis.

The Lieutenant pointed to a field at Banjaluka where Messerschmitts lurked; they wanted a troop-concentration bombed here, an airfield there eliminated. I took notes and coordinated them with their maps. The notes blurred after a day's march with them in my shoe, so I transferred the information to a silk escape map, and stuck it back inside the top of my cap.

We moved on to another command post where we were treated in the royal style to which these amazing people were accustoming us. Seeing a set of American dog-tags hanging on the windowsill in the main headquarters room, I inquired and learned a B-24 had crashed nearby about a week earlier, with seven men aboard. Besides the tags, two wallets and some navigation papers had been rescued.

One of the wallets contained a note addressed to a girl in Kansas City, written, apparently, in case something like this should happen to the guy. Normally that stuff would go to the Adjutant General, and the Army would take care of it, but I wrote the girl and told her where the boy was buried.

The Major asked: "Why is it that all these American planes crash here? Is there something wrong with the air over these mountains that it won't sustain you?" He thought that all the planes in Europe fell in Yugoslavia. I explained that we were all trying to get home, and some just didn't make it. What surprised me was that although he was a medical

officer, the Major knew nothing about oxygen; nor could he understand why the men who crashed were wearing fur-lined suits with electric heating attachment; he couldn't comprehend that it was cold up above.

We shoved off again at night, and along about twelve the Major stopped the column and asked if we'd mind waiting an hour; there was going to be a battle, he said, and they'd like to watch it! I said: "It's up to you—you know what you're doing. We just don't want to take any chances of being captured." He thought that was the funniest thing he'd ever heard. Laughing uproariously, he assured me they'd kill every German in the valley before they'd permit us to be captured.

I asked how he knew there was going to be a battle; after all, you just don't go to a battle the way you do to a matinee. He said they had learned that a German foraging party was coming out of one of the beleaguered towns, and arrangements had been made for an ambush. They knew just what time it was coming off, too.

The terrain there was extremely rough, and a full moon was reflected so brightly by the white rock you could read a newspaper by its light. We went up on a ridge, a very steep cliff with the valley below to the left. Everyone dismounted, and except for two sentries, the Partisans curled up and went to sleep. I kept pacing around.

At the appointed time the sentries awakened the Major and Captain. They rubbed their eyes, got up, stretched, and said: "Now, it's time." We all watched the valley, and pretty soon all hell broke loose. We could see tracer bullets and rocket flares going up all over the place, and during the ensuing forty-five minutes there was quite a bit of activity, not more than a quarter mile from us. We couldn't see what was going on, but we could hear a lot of noise and gunfire. It quieted down finally, and two green flares went up.

The Major said: "All right, we can go now."

"What do you mean—we can go now?" I asked.

"The battle's over," he replied. "Those flares meant we could move on." I asked who won. "We did, of course," he answered.

WE walked through the mountains all night. There were sentries all along the route. Suddenly a horse would shy, and a woman or kid would jump up from behind a rock to tell us there were Germans here or Germans there. Finally we descended into a very deep gorge and came to another command post.

They had a big table set up outdoors, and we glugged ourselves with

big platters of goat's meat swimming in gravy, big hunks of meat, and black bread. Though we had no way of knowing how much luckier we were than we'd be the next time we were potted out of the sky, we dug into that wholesome fare and polished off a sizable meal. At a council of war we decided to wait until daylight to proceed.

There had been some trouble at the post; a rather formidable German detachment had come through that day, and several Partisans had been wounded in the ensuing engagement. There was a field hospital where we were going, and the wounded men, eight of them, became part of our train.

We started around ten in the morning, with about twenty girls from twelve to sixteen years old taking turns carrying the wounded, singing constantly as they swung through the sunlit stillness. You could hear them for miles.

I FELT badly; there was nothing wrong with me or the other fellows, except the two game legs, and these kids were lugging the wounded. I said, "Let us carry these men." (Actually, I don't suppose I could have lasted a hundred yards over that terrain, but it seemed I should make the gesture.)

The Major looked at me curiously and said: "You're awfully kind but we don't need that; we have plenty of girls, and that's their job." Everybody in that country fought the war.

After walking all day we reached a village where the homefolk expected us, and everyone had been foraging for delicacies for us. We sat down in a little grove and waited. And waited. We got more and more hungry; the Major kept apologizing, but nothing happened.

The Major said: "These people want to demonstrate their hospitality and it wouldn't do for you, special guests, to eat ordinary fare." I said we'd eat anything, and added that we didn't want to take their good food because they had so little.

"We are a very proud people," the Major replied. "These people who live here don't want you to be disappointed in their hospitality."

As we waited, we heard a tremendous explosion. I looked down the road and saw people in the air, and parts of a horse and wagon floating to the ground. A German land-mine had exploded when two men and a woman ran their cart over it. One man and the woman were killed outright, and the arm of the other man was torn nearly off at the shoulder. With two big holes in his side and suffering from shock, he really was in tough shape.

Asking them to keep him covered, I dug out some sulfa powder, the only

medicine I had; flies were all over his wounds, and there was a bad, very bad, chance of infection. The guy was in agony, and he kept throwing the covers off, while I kept saying to keep him covered. They said: "He doesn't want the covers on him."

"That's not the question," I told them; "he's going to die if he isn't kept warm."

They said: "He knows he's going to die and we know he's going to die. We think when a man's going to die, if he doesn't want the covers, the least we can do is respect his wishes."

That part of their character still amazes me. Here was this fellow dying before their eyes and it didn't seem to move them; but let one of us come along with a sprained ankle and they wept in sympathy. After we'd done what we could for the dying man, we got around to a sumptuous meal, piles of food which we had to share with the flies. We put our forks in the food, blew the flies off and shoved it into our mouths. I never saw so many flies. Subsequently we all got dysentery.

Three hours later we were under way again, the litter-carrying party ahead of us. We could hear the girls singing ahead, their voices waited back on the still night air, echoing back to us over this vast, beautiful country where no man-made sound other than ours broke the natural silence for miles.

Tired as the dickens, we had to kick ourselves along to keep going; I was ashamed of being bushed while those kids were carrying the wounded and singing, and all I was hauling was my own freight. We started singing to keep our spirits up, and every now and then we'd ask how much farther we had to go. The answer was always: "Just a few kilometers." Just when we were sure we'd have to walk the rest of our lives, we arrived at Ticevo, Tito's recent headquarters.

This was the set-up at Ticevo: there was a British-American-Russian military mission on hand to coordinate Tito's activities with those of the Allies. There was a British major, and a radio operator who had walked in from a fishing boat, an American captain who had parachuted in, and a Russian colonel; I don't know how he got there, but there he was. The American had gone on to a place about a hundred miles away to be nearer Tito's new headquarters.

They had a two-way radio, and during certain hours British Intelligence in Italy would transmit coded messages, the only way we could learn when we were going to get food or, more important, when we were going to get picked up and flown out. Our only object in life was to get out of there; we'd just sit around chewing

our nails until the radio began to buzz. Then we'd get the code books and decode as fast as the operator took the message.

The Balkan Air Force, a special set-up operated by the British flying American C-47 cargo planes, would fly over and drop arms and ammunition captured from the Germans in Africa and Italy, as well as food and clothing, British uniforms, blankets and medicine. There was an American tech. sergeant there, a member of a crew from our group which had been shot down a month earlier. No one had known what had happened to them.

We had been there about four days, sending frantic messages to come and get us and getting no answer at all, when the radio came to life with: "Dropping Ticevo, ten o'clock, light an X of seven." Two C-47s were coming over at ten that night to drop supplies, and we were to light a series of seven bonfires which would form an X.

Immediately we radioed back: "Want them to land, pick up seventeen American airmen." Besides the ten of us there was a Negro fighter pilot, the tech. sergeant, a co-pilot from a third crew, the tail gunner from another crew, and three enlisted men who had escaped when the rest of their crew was killed or captured.

A MESSAGE came we would have to have all the hilltops in that area lighted. We sent Partisans over the mountaintops to build bonfires, and lighted an X of seven on the field. About nine-thirty that night we piled into a jeep that had been flown in and left by Randolph Churchill when he visited Tito in a liaison mission, and went down to the airfield. About ten a plane showed up, and the British Major ordered the Scotch radio operator to signal "Please land" on the Baldi signal lamp.

That Major was typical of his class. He didn't want to offend anybody; he didn't want to get himself in trouble, and therefore he didn't want to take the responsibility of ordering the plane to land. He kept saying: "Ask him if he will land." I thought: "Hell, if you say that, he'll think why should he land—you've got to give him some reason."

I knew Morse code and the Major didn't. While Jock was operating the lamp, I was prompting him. The Major said, "Say, 'Can you land?'" I whispered to Jock: "Don't say that; he'll never land if you ask him that. I know enough about pilots; he'll come back with some wisecrack if you send that. Send: 'For God's sake, land!'"

The plane was making wide sweeps over the field and recurrently reach-

ing a point in its turn where the crew couldn't see our signal. Light transmissions are tough to read anyway, and we had no way of knowing how much he was getting, but we kept sending, and he kept circling. We were really sweating that plane in. We thought perhaps we could drag it down out of the sky with sheer willpower.

He circled about three times and then blinked "We'll see—" We caught that much with his identification lights. He came down, made a base-leg turn, a fine approach, and I thought, "By George, he's coming in." Then he switched off his landing lights and climbed. Apparently he had been merely looking over the landing-strip and was going up to get enough altitude to establish radio contact with Italy. He flew around up there for nearly an hour and then blinked, "Sorry, I can't make it," and headed south.

WE were pretty discouraged then, envisaging a winter spent in that mountain shack with no heat or adequate clothing. We picked up the food parcels the plane had dropped, which were very welcome, and trudged wearily back to our hut. Wrapped in our parachutes, the only way we could keep warm in the cold nights, we settled down into the loneliness of our thoughts. Then our gunner, a kid from Kentucky, piped up: "Daddy, where we going to put the Christmas tree?" Everybody busted out laughing.

That was Friday. I had to decide when we were going to do something about getting out of there, and I made up my mind that if we weren't rescued by Monday morning, we'd start walking. The navigator couldn't walk—he was using crutches, but he couldn't make it by himself, and if you're going to get out of Yugo by foot, you have to do it just that way. There's one stretch of about twenty-five miles along the coast where you walk ten feet, hide maybe an hour and then crawl on your hands and knees to reach a fishing boat. You can't do that on horseback.

The poor guy knew it, but I hated to tell him. He caught me sort of talking in whispers with one of the others and said: "Now look: I'm grown up—I know what you're worrying about. Why don't you tell it to me straight?"

I said: "Well, we can't just sit around here all winter. We have to get out; we're obliged to make some effort. I've been hoping your foot would improve so when we got ready to leave you could go with us, but I don't know whether it will or not."

He said: "I don't think it will." I told him I'd decided that on Monday

we'd start marching to the coast, that if we got out, I'd come back for him even if it meant an unauthorized mission. He agreed it was the only thing to do. The next day, Saturday, we decided to forage for a little extra food and have a good Sunday breakfast. We traded with the natives and got twenty-two eggs to scramble, and we had bacon, coffee and canned milk dropped by the C-47.

Sunday morning we built a fire and started the coffee-water boiling. There was a Yugoslav there who had been tail-turret operator on a B-24. His turret had been cut right off from the rest of the plane in a mid-air collision. He had spun twenty-five thousand feet in the turret while he was trying to struggle into his parachute. Then he had to get out of the turret itself, a tough acrobatic feat under the best conditions. He made it, though, and he was a great asset to us, because he spoke the language. He got a native to bring us some Rochquila, and he made up a sort of hot toddy which was delicious. After we polished that off, I started fixing breakfast.

Just as I got ready to break the eggs into the pan, I heard the roar of familiar engines. Six P-51s came over the mountains about one thousand feet above us, followed by four C-47s. We went wild. We waved at them, waved sheets and screamed and yelled and danced on the ground—and they went right on past. I thought, "My God, they're going somewhere else."

Then like eagles circling a mountain crag, the big birds made a slow turn and started setting down on the airfield below us. We just forgot about the eggs and everything else, and dashed madly down the hill. It turned out the planes had come to pick up Partisan wounded from the nearby field hospital and fly the worst cases to the General Hospital in Italy. Regardless of our S.O.S., the pilots didn't know we were there; they only had instructions to pick up one hundred Partisan wounded, but they made room for us.

There were eighteen litter cases and six of our crew in one plane. The expressions on the faces of the litter patients was something to remember. They were badly wounded, and it was the first time any of them had ridden in an airplane. There was a little girl about eleven years old whose foot had been blown off by a land mine, and her face was like a movie; the expressions told just what was going through her mind. There was hope—what the trip meant to her. She was going where she'd have plenty to eat and medical attention. Then there was fear—of this great shuddering monster in which she was leaving her homeland. I gave her some chocolate from my K-ration kit, and that

brought a new expression; she'd never tasted chocolate before.

Back on the safe side of the Adriatic, they took us to a hospital where we were deloused and fed, and three of the boys stayed there, two with banged-up feet and one with dysentery. The rest of us went down that afternoon to Fifteenth Air Force Headquarters to report. They were a little bit bored—it was tea-time and nobody wanted to interrogate us. We'd had only a sandwich at the hospital and were pretty hungry; finally I raised a little hell, and they got the formalities of reinstating us over with. We went to a hotel and spent the night drinking champagne with the Negro fighter pilot, another guy and the rest of our crew.

The next day, or evening, rather, we went back to the base, and I walked into the Colonel's office. It was dark; there was one lamp hanging from the ceiling, and you couldn't see very well. I saluted and said: "Lieutenant Northcross and crew reporting back for duty, sir." He looked squarely at me and asked, "Where in the hell have you been?"

I told the Colonel the story, and he said: "Well, I'm glad to have you back." I allowed how we were glad to be back. Next morning the Flight Surgeon called me in, looked me over and asked: "How do you feel about flying?" I said I thought it was, in all probability, here to stay. He said not to be so damned funny. He asked whether I was nervous, and I said I didn't know; I hadn't flown in a couple of weeks. He said I'd fly again, but first he wanted to send me to a rest camp on the Isle of Capri. I said I'd rather go to Rome.

The doc said Capri would be better for my health than Rome, and he wasn't interested in where I would prefer to go, anyway. "If you want to go to Capri now, you can go," he said; "your whole crew can go for a week. Usually we wait until a man's had about thirty missions and send him then, because that's when he really needs it. But with the kind of experience you've had, I think you'd better go down there before you fly."

I THOUGHT that if we waited for thirty missions, we'd probably never see Capri, at the rate we were going, so I took him up on it. We went and had a perfectly marvelous time; it was one thing the Army operated to perfection. We lived in a luxurious hotel, wore what we pleased, stayed in bed if we wanted to, ate when we wanted to and always had something to do; always there were pleasant people around.

We used to rent Count Ciano's sailing yacht from the Coast Guard, get the mess officers to put up a picnic

lunch, steal some gin from the bar and go off for the day. We'd pick up two or three mighty nice Red Cross girls and some local yokels and visit the Blue Grotto and all those corny things. We had a wonderful time; I was glad I hadn't gone to Rome.

BACK to the grind, we flew five or six practice missions and some test flights, and made a trip to Bologna. The Fifth Army was trying to take Bologna and the Twelfth and Fifteenth Air Forces had a maximum air effort on; they bombed everything from outhouses to munition works. We hit rough weather coming home, our elevator control jammed, and it took nearly two hours of wrestling over the field to shake it loose. Then we had to land on one wheel because we'd ruined a tire on the metal runway taking off; I was getting very tired of it all when we finally set the ship down.

On our next mission the weather was so bad we waited three hours before taking off; I was convinced the game was going to be called on account of rain, but about nine A.M. we got the signal to turn 'em over. Over Yugoslavia we circled, looking for a hole in the weather, and all the other groups went home. I thought sure that was what we were going to do. Every time we turned south I thought we were going back home; every time I thought we were going home, we turned north again.

We were milling around between two layers of overcast, and nobody knew where we were going; navigation without radio was impossible and we had to maintain radio silence after crossing the Adriatic. I had no idea where we were, and the navigator hadn't an inkling.

All of a sudden through the overcast came a lot of flak, smacking our Number 3 engine in the oil pump and spraying oil all over the ship. We had to feather the prop, and with the bomb load we were carrying, we couldn't keep up with the formation. I turned and started to go home, which was what I'd wanted to do all along, anyway. About five minutes after we left formation, we ran into some of the fanciest shooting I've ever seen. We must have run over some sort of postgraduate school for anti-aircraft gunners. Those guys didn't waste a shell; two bursts in front, two on each side bracketed us, and then they started hitting the center of the ship. The fire wasn't heavy, but extremely accurate. It knocked out the other port engine.

I called to Ed to jettison the bombs. "But we might be over Yugo," he objected. I said: "Don't argue—throw 'em out unless you want to ride 'em down." He yanked the salvo lever,

and ten 500-pounders disappeared into the undercast.

I started doing everything but outside loops, trying to get away with the wing cocked at sixty degrees. Dan called: "How about some evasive action?" I said: "What the hell do you call this?"

Then fire broke out in Number 2, and there was still about fifteen hundred gallons of gas in the wing tanks right under the engines. I figured the thing was going to blow up and spoil our whole afternoon, and I told the boys they'd have to get out. We tried to smother the fire, but it was no go.

I said: "When you hear the bell it will be exactly time to jump," and rang the alarm bell.

Before leaving the ship, I put on the automatic pilot, because I wanted her to crash outside German territory if possible; and just as I was about to jump, I saw my flimsy, bearing all sorts of information about the raid, still stuck on the throttle pedestal. Afraid it might not burn, I took it with me.

When I left the ship, the two starboard engines still were operating. Apparently a cable had parted in the automatic-pilot control and the ship started to circle like a model plane tied to a stake. The first thing I saw after I pulled the ripcord was this flaming B-24 losing altitude as fast as I was, and chasing me down.

The ship swung past so close I felt my eyebrows singe. No sooner had I heaved a sigh of relief than it had made a big turn and was coming back. It made four passes at me, and I was sure that if it didn't hit me, it would blow up in my face. I thought: "What a ridiculous way to get killed, getting run over by your own plane!" Finally it blew up on the other side of the arc.

It took me twenty-five minutes to reach the ground; I kept looking at my watch, and wondering if I was going to make it. I hit in the woods, and by the time I had extricated myself from the 'chute, I was surrounded by people. There were no soldiers in the crowd, which seemed very friendly; I thought, "Hell, this is a cinch; it's going to be just like the last time; these people must be Partisans." I also thought: "This time I'm going home, I'm not going to take any more of this foolishness!"

No sooner had I been reassured that there were no Germans around, than here came three Stormtroopers. I had my .45, but I just let it stay where it was. One of these guys had a Burp gun; the other two had rifles; and I figured there was no use in me fooling around with a .45—I couldn't hit what I aimed at anyway, and the troopers were surrounded by women and children.

They relieved me of my gun, but they were very polite and agreeable. They took me to a farmhouse about a mile from where I'd landed. I was craving a cigarette something awful, but when I reached in my coverall pocket to see if I had any smokes, I discovered to my horror that I still had the flimsy with me. It bore the time of take-off and gas-load, bomb-load, course, altitude, air-speed, target, target-time, initial point, aim-point, group commanders, box leaders—everything the Germans could want to know about the raid was on that damn flimsy.

I thought: "God, what'll I do?" Ducking behind a wagon on the pretense of removing my flying-boots, I struck a match, but one of the S.S. men saw me and grabbed it. I popped the flimsy into my mouth; never in my life have I eaten anything so repulsive. It was mimeographed on fiber paper, and I chewed it for three hours.

I don't know whether she gathered from the face I was making that whatever I was chewing wasn't very tasty; but as I munched away, a little girl, a beautiful child with long flaxen hair, came up and offered me a bunch of grapes and a piece of bread. Another little girl brought some grapes, but the first told her they weren't good enough, to get some better grapes.

THEY took me to a place called Petau and stowed me in the local sheriff's office; not the jail itself, but the office part, adjacent to the police barracks. I slept on the floor of the kitchen, and was nice and warm. When I woke up, there was a stout woman busting at the stove. We traded smiles, and she gave me a bowl of ersatz coffee and a piece of bread. I went to the courtyard to wash.

The building and courtyard were arranged in medieval style, the main building surrounding the court on three sides, and a natural cliff shutting off the fourth. On one side there was a woodshed, and behind that a stairway went up the wall of one side of the building and on up the cliff.

There was no one in the courtyard except a guard who was standing down the alleyway leading to the court, and he had his back turned to me. While I was washing at the pump, I kept looking around, figuring maybe I could dash up the steps and get out. Then I wondered what I'd do if I did get out—I had no idea where I was, had no map, and was wearing highly conspicuous clothes. Going up the steps I'd be silhouetted against the wall facing the barracks, where I suspected there were a lot of guns. I decided the hell with it, if I ever got caught on those stairs, I'd be a sitting pigeon.

In a little while a couple of guards called me, and we boarded a regular civilian bus. The passengers stared at me curiously; and a young woman, a nice-looking babe, honored me with a wink. I thought it was a sort of funny situation, standing in a German bus making goo-goo eyes at this gal. After a while the novelty of me wore off and nobody paid any more attention.

WE went to Marburg, and I'm sure that is where the sharpshooters that knocked us down were located. We had released our bombs in the overcast to speed up our evasive action, and damned if they hadn't hit smack in the center of Marburg, demolishing, among other things, the Gestapo headquarters. The good burghers were highly annoyed.

They put me in a civilian jail. I was joined there by our radio operator, ball-turret gunner and waist gunner. The latter had been hit in the back by a flock of flak and was in pretty bad shape. The jail was so full they couldn't accommodate us in cells, but had to keep us locked in the corridor. I rattled the gate at the end of the line and told the guard I wanted a doctor. The guard went away, and a typical Prussian-type S.S. Hauptmann came back.

In flawless English, he said: "The reason we are not able to give your man medical attention is because all of the doctors in the city are busy taking care of the civilians who were injured in the bombing yesterday."

I asked: "Bombing yesterday? What time was that?" And he said: "There was a lone terror-raid, one ship about one o'clock in the afternoon." I thought: "That's me, brother!" but I didn't say so. I said: "Well, I'm a prisoner of war, and obviously can't force you to do anything. But according to the terms of the Geneva Convention, you've got to provide medical attention for this man."

The Prussian replied: "We accept our obligations very seriously, but you will have to wait until you get to the Luftwaffe field, and there you will get medical attention. We take very good care of our prisoners." Then he launched into a tirade against Americans. "I don't understand you Americans," he declared. "I lived in America for twelve years. I don't understand why you, who have everything, come here and bomb our women and children."

"Well," I said, "as I said before, I'm a prisoner, and I'm not in any position to discuss politics with you. But it seems to me, if I understand this situation correctly, that before your cities were bombed, there was the small matter of Warsaw, Rotterdam, Coventry, Bristol, London and Southampton."

"Ach," he snorted, "propaganda!" He started to walk away, then turned back and said: "Do you know what you have written on your back?" I knew what he was talking about but pretended I didn't. I asked: "Back?"

"Not you, perhaps, but your comrades," he replied. "You know what they have written on their backs—'Murder, Incorporated.'"

I almost burst out laughing in his face. Four months earlier, when I was in combat training at Charleston, the crews were assembled for briefing and an Air Force memorandum was issued on the subject "Naming of Aircraft." It stated: "In the future, no combat aircraft will be given terroristic names." (Somebody said, "What do we name 'em—'Deutschland Uber Alles'") The memo went on to tell how a B-17 entitled "Murder, Inc." had been shot down over Germany, and of course that was just raw meat for Dr. Goebbels. They had been selling the German people and the residents of occupied countries on the Luftgangster theory, the proposition that the only Americans low and dirty enough to bomb civilians were Chicago and New York underworld characters who got paid a thousand dollars a raid.

Then these guys come down with their ship painted "Murder, Inc."—they were a bunch of Eighth Air Force youngsters who believed in putting stuff on their jackets, so their backs were labeled, too—and it was really grist for the Goebbels mill. There wasn't any use trying to explain the American sense of humor to our jailer because the Germans just don't have any. They take themselves too seriously; that's why they're always making war on people. I just said, "I don't know what you're talking about," and finally he went away.

The guy who was wounded was a substitute gunner. Mac had had an attack of appendicitis and been grounded just before our last mission, and the boy who flew with us was on his first trip. A hell of a nice kid, he had an awful lot of guts. He had been hit in the small of the back, and the flak apparently had penetrated his kidneys. His pulse was strong, but he had to be carried face down, and they wouldn't give us a stretcher. Some sonofabitch had taken his shoes away when he landed, and his feet were bare, he was cold and he really was suffering. We had no medicine of any kind, no morphine, not even a cigarette to take his mind off the pain. They had taken all his clothes except the electric flying suit, and that was no good without being plugged in. I gave him my jacket, and we tried to make him as comfortable as possible.

About two in the afternoon they brought a horse-drawn hearse and we

loaded him into that. Under heavy S.S. guard we marched through the streets to the railroad station, carrying our parachutes while the guards carried our guns. We placed the wounded man in a baggage car, and the rest of us sat in a second-class carriage. There was room only for us and one guard, with another trooper stationed in the corridor.

The parachutes were bundled up on the seat opposite me, and damned if there wasn't the butt of a .45 sticking out of one of them! The Germans were too thorough to let anything like that slip by, so it quite obviously was a trick, an invitation for one of us to grab for the gun; and after the shooting died down, they wouldn't have to bother much with us. I caught the ball-turret gunner, a gay lad who was likely to do something he would regret later, eying the gun and told him to let it lie. We just let it stay there.

We rode about four hours and disembarked at Abtissendorf, a little station out in the middle of nowhere. There was a well-camouflaged Luftwaffe field there with a Ju-88 apparently under permanent camouflage. They locked us in a cell about eight feet wide and fifteen feet long with a window boarded up so that you could see only about four inches of sky. The keeper brought us a loaf of bread, and I kept asking them please to take the wounded kid to a hospital. Finally, about eight that night, two medical men came, gave him a shot of morphine, and later took him to a hospital in Graz. That was the last I ever saw of him, but I think he probably was all right; his pulse was strong.

WHILE at Abtissendorf, the rest of the crew rode in in the middle of the night, all in perfectly good shape. They were put in a cell next to ours, and although we weren't supposed to communicate with them, we talked our jailer into letting us go next door and visit. That jailer was a sort of good-time-Charley, a ne'er-do-well who was himself confined to the guardhouse. We used to call him "Loud-Mouth-Charley"—for he made more noise than anybody I've ever seen.

There was a little fellow in charge whom we called the Weasel; he looked like a rodent. Our bombardier spoke German well, and the Weasel informed him we would be taken to Budapest. To me, that was like saying we were being sent home, because a week earlier Admiral Horthy had thrown in the towel in Hungary. The Germans had slapped him in jail and continued to fight, but I figured Hungary would be like Rumania, ripe for the picking. I thought that any minute Hungary would be in Russian hands, and when the Weasel said we

were going to Budapest I felt like Br'er Rabbit when the farmer threatened to throw him in the briar patch. I had a lot to learn.

AFTER four days in the cell at Abtissendorf we started in the morning for Saint Gothard; the Weasel was to turn us over to Hungarian guards. After a six-hour jerk-and-jump ride, our train stopped in the middle of the country and the Weasel said we could wait five hours until eight that night for another train, or walk some twenty kilometers to a junction. I said: "Let's walk." After being locked up, walking was a luxury; and besides I didn't see any sense in delaying; we were going where we wanted to go, and I thought we were getting a free ride.

There were ten of us without the injured gunner (we'd had a photographer with us that mission), the Weasel and one other guard. Walking along the railroad track through the country, the Weasel, armed only with a Luger on his hip, was in front of me and the guard was bringing up the rear of the column with his rifle slung on his shoulder. A break would have been a cinch, but I kept thinking: "What the hell, we're getting free transportation where we want to go, and we have no maps, compass or food." I was just dumb.

We spent that night in the railroad station at Saint Gothard. They had nothing for us to eat, explaining they weren't equipped to feed prisoners, and we'd just have to do without. About ten o'clock some Wehrmacht soldiers came in who were being transferred from the Balkan theater up North. One spoke very good English; he had been educated at Oxford, and was a nice sort of guy. We talked and they gave us cigarettes. The Oxonian asked: "Why must we fight when you and I can get along so well together? Hitler, Stalin, Churchill and Roosevelt really were the root of this trouble. What we ought to do is put them in a ring and let them fight it out while we sit together and drink beer. Isn't that a better way to settle this thing?"

He had been in the Army four years and was pretty well fed up. I said: "That's probably a good idea, but if Hitler, Stalin, Roosevelt and Churchill were in a ring, Hitler wouldn't have a chance; he'd be outnumbered." He answered: "Hell, we're outnumbered anyway."

While we were in the station, which was near the Hungarian border, a number of civilians came in and asked such questions as was it true that all Hungarians in the United States were in concentration camps. We told them it was a lot of baloney, that they were being misled by the Germans.

Our guards were standing there but they didn't interfere, probably because they didn't know enough English to understand what we were talking about.

About four o'clock in the morning we boarded a train for Budapest. We had been assigned our Hungarian guard, a sickly type, and with him, we had a compartment to ourselves. Half the windows had been shot out, and the coaches were dirty and drafty, but we were for it, we were headed the right way—we thought. Every now and then a Hungarian soldier would bring a girl to the window of our cubbyhole to stare in at us as though we were a strange species of fish.

Around nine A. M. the train pulled into a marshaling yard at Zombethely, which the Fifteenth Air Force had just given a working over. Locomotives were standing on their snouts; rails were sticking straight up in the air, box-cars were scattered fifty yards from the tracks—it really was a mess. Unfortunately there was a hospital right next to the station; some of the bombs had hit there, and the people were highly annoyed.

No sooner had our wheels stopped rolling than a rock came hurtling through the window in our compartment and bopped the bombardier on the head. There we were with an angry crowd outside and only a puny guard of six to "protect" us. I thought: "My God, we'd better pull out of here fast!" Then they told us we were getting off the train.

I told the boys: "Keep your heads and look straight ahead. Don't pay any attention to anybody. If anybody says anything to you, don't even look at him. March like soldiers; don't look around, and we'll be all right." We looked the crowd over before we stepped down, and I never felt such tension. The mob was just waiting for an excuse to lynch us; you could feel the electricity.

We walked stiff as ramrods, straight ahead. It was a dreary, rainy day; we never knew when somebody was going to hit us from behind, and our back muscles were drawn tight just waiting for it. We started marching from the station, and the crowd followed along, silent as death. There was no yelling, no muttering, no sound to break the atmosphere of sullen meanness. As we went down the street, the crowd thinned a little; somebody went by on a bicycle and yelled something about gangsters, and somebody threw a rock. That was all.

They locked us up in a place that looked like an armory, and I'm sure that never again in my life will I be so glad to get into jail. We were left in a large cell, which looked like a medieval dungeon, with board shelves and wooden pillows on which to lie.

A Hungarian officer, about sixty years old, came in, apologized for the meager accommodations and asked if there was anything we wanted. We said we'd like a little food and some coffee, and he replied: "I must apologize. We have very limited supplies, but I am calling up, trying to get things." Then he added, in an apologetic, weary tone:

"I understand about war, but the people here are not very kindly disposed toward you because a hospital here was bombed the day before yesterday. I know it was a mistake; I understand about these things—they shouldn't build hospitals around railroad stations; but it's just the way it worked out. I'll do the best I can for you." About two o'clock the next afternoon we got some goulash which would have been wonderful if we had had some salt; as it was, it was absolutely flavorless. But brother, we ate it.

That night we hopped another train for Budapest. It was only one hundred miles from Zombethely, about like going from New York to Philadelphia, and we figured it at about three hours, allowing for strained travel conditions. It took forty-eight.

We had a new set of guards for the trip, a bunch of country yokels who had a nice soft assignment taking us to Budapest; and then they were to be on the town. In one compartment there were ten of us, an Hungarian paratrooper, nurse, merchant mariner, Focke-Wulf-190 pilot and his two children, a couple of miscellaneous civilians and a railroad official. Everyone was friendly and very gay. They'd sing Hungarian tunes, and then say: "You sing an American song."

SO we sang, "In the Evening by the Moonlight," "My Old Kentucky Home" and the like; and every time we got close to one of their busted-up railway yards, we'd carol: "I've Been Working on the Railroad." Fortunately, they never caught on.

The nurse was sort of cute. One of the medical people who jumped behind the lines to care for the wounded, she had made forty-two leaps. She took quite a fancy to me, and ran all around the car collecting things to eat, cigarettes and razor and soap, with which she shaved me. She insisted upon leaving a mustache—the only one I've ever had.

There was a cubbyhole Men's Room at the end of our car, and some passenger had tied a big fat goose in there. Geese can be the most indignant creatures in the world. They're typical Prussians; they storm and yell and get mad as hell when they're disturbed, and it was a trifle embarrassing to start into the lavatory and have this beast come squawking at you.

Practically everyone in the car knew of the barnyard denizen we had quartered in the Men's Room—which was equally a Ladies' Room—but not this nurse. She started to open the door, and this feathered terror came charging at her. Everybody roared with laughter, and she turned cerise.

When we got to Budapest, however, we sobered quickly. There it was the same sort of crowd, sullen, hostile, but bigger. Our hosts hadn't decided what to do with us and we had to stand for three hours in the midst of this silent mob; in those three hours, we lived ten years.

Just as we were ready to leave—I was pretty well keyed up, we all were, and had had a bad state of nerves for a long while—some fanatic in the crowd dashed up and spit in my face. I lost control and started after him. There was quite a *mêlée*: the guards were chasing the expectorator; our boys were chasing me; and we were tumbling all over each other. They caught the character who started it, and he turned out to be a civilian accompanied by a guy wearing a Nazi armband. So far as I know, nothing more came of it.

Our ten Hungarian guards took us to a jail which seemed to be the cellar of a converted apartment-house, shook hands, wished us well, and took off for their week-end in Budapest.

NEXT night we were taken for interrogation in a political prison populated by almost every sort of people classed "undesirable" by the Nazis, with a separate Hungarian-guarded section for American airmen. Twenty-two of us spent that night in a big room. The following morning our clothes were deloused, we were given a shower and we went back to the large assembly-room to await our turn for interrogation. Of course we had been told time and time again that if we were captured we should give no information except name, rank and serial number, that we were not to gabble about anything else, no matter how innocuous it might seem.

First to question me was a German non-com.

"What was your target?"

"I can't tell you."

"Where were you based?"

"I'm sorry, but I can't tell you."

He was very agreeable, just nodding when I said I couldn't answer his queries. Then he asked: "What is your position on the plane?"

I said: "I'm still sorry, but I can only give you my name, rank and serial number." I was wearing pilot's wings, so my general position was pretty obvious, I thought; but I could, of course, have been a co-pilot.

He asked: "May I see your hands?" My hands were dangling at the end of

my wrists so I held them out. He took a quick look and wrote down: "*First Pilot, Four-Engine Aircraft.*" I had calluses on my left hand, none on my right; had I been co-pilot, it would have been the other way round.

Following this routine questioning, we were placed in solitary confinement, each man to his own cell. They took everything from us but the clothes we were wearing and left us to stew in our own juice. After three days, during which I amused myself chiefly by reviewing my lugubrious past, I was called out. By that time I'd acquired a substantial, dirty beard, and felt thoroughly slovenly and unkempt. I walked into the interrogation-room, and there sat a guy who looked as though he had just stepped out of a band-box—clean-shaven, new uniform, polished boots.

Of course it was all part of the build-up. They figured on the psychological disadvantage suffered by a crummy man who has been used to being clean, when he's confronted by the epitome of cleanliness—even if it's less than skindEEP. It's hard to talk back to a guy under those circumstances.

The spit-and-polish officer threw me a couple of questions, and I replied with the same old name, rank and serial number. Then he tossed me a pamphlet, printed in English, and snapped: "*Geneva Convention.*" He pointed to a marked paragraph which said, in effect, that captured military personnel must give name, rank, grade, serial number, regiment or unit, place of birth, name of parents, religion and two or three other things.

I said: "I'm sorry to be difficult, but after all, I've never seen a copy of the Geneva Convention in my life, and you could print this as well as anyone. I only know that my Government tells me that if I'm captured, I'm to give my name, rank and serial number, and nothing else."

Biting his words as though he were trying to pick his teeth with the tip of his tongue, he said: "Your Government is a Government of two tongues. It tells us one thing when it signs this Convention, and then tells you something else."

"Well," I said, "if that's the way it is, that's the way it's going to be. You're a soldier; I'm a soldier; you must understand that when you're told to do something, that's what you do."

"I'm being very patient with you," he replied. "I'm trying to do you a big favor. I can send you to a prisoner-of-war camp where you'll be well treated and given all the privileges of war prisoners, but until you give us this information, you are not a prisoner of war."

In that case, I asked, for what was I being held. "Illegal entry," he snapped.

I laughed. "You mean that I forced myself into this position, wearing an American uniform? Illegal entry? Into what country?"

"Hungary," he replied. I said: "I was brought into Hungary by armed guards; it wasn't my idea. Nothing, since I bailed out of an airplane, has been my idea." Without another word he waved his hand in dismissal.

A COUPLE of days later he called me back, said he was annoyed with me and reiterated that I was being "very difficult." Pointing through the window, he asked: "Do you see those men out there?" I looked out and saw a group milling around in the yard. "They're going to a Luftwaffe camp in Silesia," he continued. "I want to send you with them, but I can't until I get this information for the Red Cross."

He showed me a bunch of cards and said: "All those men have filled out these cards. All you have to do is fill one out. Look at it; no military information there!" About a week before, we had been warned about these phony Red Cross cards the Germans would pull. By getting us to answer some perfectly harmless personal question, they figured to get us talking.

I looked at this fellow's desk, and there was a book, a sort of yearbook, that had been got out by the publicity department of one of our Bomb Groups. I had read about it in *Stars and Stripes* hardly two weeks earlier—it commemorated the group's first year of active duty; and already the Germans had gotten hold of it.

The technique was amazing in its simplicity, and it was flawless. One of the boys of that group would be shot down and he'd come there for interrogation. "Oh, yes," this inquisitor would say, "you're Lieutenant Stevenson. You went to Columbia University; you entered the Army such-and-such a date; you took your basic training at such-and-such a field; your instructor's name was so-and-so—" They'd tell the guy all about himself before asking anything. He'd figure, hell, they know everything already; there's nothing I can add. And then they'd ask him to clear up a few points.

Pooh-Bah said, "Fill out this card," and, with what was becoming monotonous regularity, I replied: "Sorry, I can't do it." Apparently they knew nothing about our group. He said: "I'm really very annoyed. You know, I can leave you here to rot in jail! It won't be pleasant, not very pleasant." I said: "I'm sorry. All I can do is what I'm told."

He called a guard, and I was let out into the courtyard. I took a couple of deep breaths and found a fellow I knew. I told him about the cards, and

he said: "You might as well sign it now, because if you don't they'll give you the black-room treatment, and then you'll sign anything." I asked whether he'd had the treatment, and he said no, but he knew a couple of guys who had. "They weren't much good for anything after that," he added, not too encouragingly.

I was taken back to my cell, and a few days passed without anything happening. Then someone came to the door and called: "What's your name?"

I told him.

Back slid the bolt, the door came open and I walked out. They took me to a room where there was one German officer, whom I'd never seen, and four Americans. The German was working over some papers when I went in; he didn't look up, just barked, "Sit down!" I took the chair opposite him, and he pulled out one of the same old cards. Instead of handing it to me, he started to ask the questions. I was a little bit annoyed; it was getting terribly repetitious.

"What's your mother's maiden name?" he asked.

I sort of leaned forward and said somewhat emphatically: "Look, I'll give you my name, my rank and my serial number—and that's all!"

HE threw his pencil down and barked: "Is your mother's name a military secret?"

"I'm telling you I'm not going to answer any of these questions," I replied.

"We'll see," he shouted. "You come with me!"

I still didn't believe anything was going to happen to me; I thought it was all a bluff. He left me in the hallway with a curt, "Stay here!" and went downstairs. Mark came along under guard, apparently headed in the direction from which I'd come, and I told him not to fall for the Red Cross card racket.

While we were talking, my officer friend came back up the steps and along the corridor. I didn't actually see him, but something flickered in the corner of my eye and I ducked. The right hook he had thrown from behind didn't actually hurt because I'd rolled with it, but I went down. Mark started yelling, and the guard towed him away. The officer kicked me.

I got up and he started hitting me with his fist. I thoughtlessly hit back. He got livid and started fumbling for his gun, got the damn thing out and pointed it at me, screaming at the top of his lungs. He pulled the hammer back and stuck the muzzle within two inches of my face. There he was, trembling with rage—I never saw anyone so mad in my life—punching at

me with his left hand and holding the gun in his right.

I thought, "My God, if he doesn't shoot me on purpose, he'll do it accidentally." I was scared. I started backing down the corridor, or getting shoved backward down the corridor. Every time he hit me, I'd instinctively start to raise my hand, and he'd shove the gun against my face. He opened the door to a cell at the corridor end and pushed me in; I kept backing away, ducking the blows, till I got to the far wall and had to stop. I couldn't go any farther. He was yelling and cursing, and that gun looked like the speaking end of a 16-inch Navy rifle.

Looking down that barrel was beginning to have the fascination of watching a snake uncoil. I kept looking for the bullet and thinking I would duck when I saw it coming. Then a character showed up whom I'd never seen, some guy in civilian clothes, and he yelled: "What's your name?"

I told him.

"What?" he screamed. "That god-damn' spy, that gangster!" I must have been an international spy, or something; anyway, he sounded as though he'd learned the dreaded name of Northcross at his mother's knee.

He came in, and they both started working on me. I was so scared by that time that I didn't feel a thing. This guy kept waving his gun under my nose, and I remember yelling: "For God's sake put that gun away before somebody gets hurt!"

They worked on me for fifteen or twenty minutes, and in the middle of it the guy who had been interrogating me originally walked in and started protesting in German. They told him to go to hell, and he turned and walked out. Finally they walked out. As they left, the uniformed man spat over his shoulder: "You will be tried and shot!"

I didn't know on what charge they were going to "try" me, but the prospect didn't seem too pleasant. When they closed the door, I realized I must be in the black room, a cell about twenty feet square, and from the feel of the air, equally high. I wouldn't know. There were no windows, and the double door had a mattress between its halves. As the door closed, I heard the Hungarian guard speak to the German and the latter replied: "Nichts essen." Having no idea whether I was to be there a few hours, days or the rest of what seemed a very uncertain span of life, the prospect of being without food was not encouraging.

When they closed the door, I was enveloped in a tangible blackness; I've never experienced anything like it, you could cut the dark into strips and wind them around your finger. There

wasn't a stick of furniture, nothing but stone walls and this airtight door. I didn't know whether any air was getting in, whether they were going to suffocate me, or just leave me buried alive. It was very unpleasant.

If you've never gone in for that sort of thing, I wouldn't recommend it. A lot of guys went through it, and they'll know what I'm talking about. It's cold, you have no blanket, nothing to lie on but the floor, so you lie there and shiver. You try to walk, and every time you take a step, you run into a wall. You lose all orientation and begin to realize how essential light is to human existence, as necessary as air, food, drink or anything else.

That night the Russians came over and gave Budapest a terrible pasting from the air. The target was right next door, and that was one sound—the only sound—that got through to me: the whine of bombs as they headed my way, and the chatter of flak guns ranged all around the place. As the bombs burst, the building rocked. I was in bad shape that night.

After thirty-six hours, which might have been thirty-six years, they let me out and I was taken to another office and brought before the civilian who had been knocking me around the previous day. My spirit was pretty well broken, I was low; and if they'd asked me for the blueprints and the mortgage on the old homestead, they could have had them both. But he didn't ask anything except was I ready to apologize.

"For what?"

He laughed deprecatingly and said: "You don't think your conduct was the sort of thing to be expected from an educated American officer, do you? The German sergeant asked you a civil question, and you tried to make him look foolish in front of other people."

"I don't consider that I have anything to apologize for," I replied. "In fact, I think your treatment of prisoners is rather barbarous."

"Well," he said, "I'll see whether the director will give you another chance to become a prisoner of war."

"You've got me," I told him. "I don't understand this deal you're pulling here at all."

I WAS to find out in a few days. They put me in a nice white cell with God's own sunlight streaming through a high window, a bed, water and something to eat twice a day. And for some reason they didn't bother me any more—no more questions. I learned later that many other guys had had the same experience.

After about five days they tossed me into a truck with some twenty-five other fellows I'd never seen before and carted me to the railroad station.

On the way we stopped at what seemed to be a headquarters for German airmen in the finest residential section of Budapest. They were packing to leave; even the truck in which we rode was loaded with filing cabinets and other office equipment, and the whole train was carrying remnants of the Luftwaffe headquarters which was being evacuated.

As we boarded the train we could hear Russian artillery fire and thought we still might be cut off. We were given what our captors considered rations for a three-day trip—a loaf of bread and one can of horsemeat for five men. The trip lasted nine days.

We had only two hundred and fifty miles to go, but by that time German communications had been so thoroughly disrupted that the train would make thirty or forty miles, and then be broken up, with our car left standing in some marshaling yards for as long as twenty-four hours. Since the yards were top-priority targets, we had little to do save look at our watches and wait for target-time, because we knew the bombs were coming—and they always came. The weather gave us a break, though; and although we were strafed by P-51s at a place called Poppa, they didn't get any of us. We spent several nights in such yards as Vienna and Breslau, where we would have been pasted to oblivion if it hadn't been for the bad weather.

After nine days in a boxcar we made Sagan in Silesia, and were placed in a camp where the whole attitude toward us was reversed. Suddenly our captors were courteous; they gave us American cigarettes and tacked a "sir" on the end of every sentence. There, as throughout our imprisonment, the enlisted men were kept in separate establishments from the officers. One of the hardest things to take was the separation of crews who had trained, lived and fought together.

UNDER our new treatment we were like whipped dogs suddenly patted; there was much grateful wagging of tails. There were five compounds in the camp, Stalag Luft 3, and each compound was an entity separated from the others by a double-row of barbed-wire fence topped by guard towers—or goon-boxes, as we called them. I found I was rooming with fourteen men who had just cooked supper. They had Red Cross parcels, none of which I'd seen after having been shut down almost a month; and when I saw and smelled the food, my eyes bugged out like a tramped-on bullfrog's. I thought: "I've got to restrain myself and act like a human being." Then I pitched in and ate like a wild animal. The other guys sat around and laughed and made great fun of me later.

The camp was well organized. The fellows got mail and packages from home and the Red Cross with reasonable regularity, and they even had a small-scale stock-market set up, along with a news-room and theater where they put on skits—the YMCA sent us costumes, a victrola and records. After what I'd been going through, it was like dying and going to heaven.

But the monotony was deadly. Every morning we'd wake up confident the war was going to end before sundown; wishful thinking completely clouded our vision. We celebrated, if that's the right word, Christmas in that camp. My only present was a pair of mittens Dan made out of an extra suit of underwear.

Everything went well until mid-January. About the fifteenth the Russians started closing in, and news from the West front was entirely static. We'd decided our troops never were going to move, that they were going to sit there and let the Russians win the war for them. Everyone began to speculate whether we'd be left there for the Russians to liberate, be shot or be moved. All kinds of wild rumors started the rounds, but the consensus was that they couldn't take care of that many and they had no facilities for transporting us, because the railroads had been shot to hell.

The night of the twenty-seventh of January we were sitting around reading. There had been a lot of talk that day that we would be moved, and some guys were sufficiently pessimistic to have sewn packs together out of blankets. I hadn't done a thing. I was sure we weren't going anywhere.

Then somebody came in and said: "We're leaving in an hour." Actually, we got ready in thirty-five minutes. We didn't know what to take—it was blue cold outside and snowing to beat all hell; but we stuffed some blankets in our packs, a little bit of clothing, just whatever we could lay hands on that we thought we might need.

We fashioned a sled out of two benches that had stood at the end of the room, stacked all the food we had on that, and went out beside the road. I took a quick look into my crystal ball and prognosticated: "This is going to be a nightmare." It was.

With everyone ready to go there was a long, long delay while we stood in the driving snow and shivered. It was two and a half hours before we moved. The Colonel came by and told us we were going to be moved on foot, that the Germans had too few guards, and anyone who fell out of line, whatever the reason, instantly would be shot.

It was very cold and almost midnight when we marched out. We hoofed it until eleven the next morning, when we reached Friewaldau and

were herded into a small stockade, a brand-new, brick, one-story affair. There was just one room, and we were told to hit the floor; we were going to get seven hours' rest. Our group was first in, and we arranged ourselves at the far end of the room. There was a stove with no heat in it which served as a table. More filed in until the room was filled from end to end with teeming humanity. We ate cold Spam and cheese from our portable larder, and curled up close to each other on the floor to keep warm. The way it was crowded, we would have had to stay close together, anyway.

NO sooner had we gotten to sleep than a guy woke me up and said: "Come on, we've got to get out of here." I said, "What time is it?" and he answered, "One-thirty." I said, "Hell, we're supposed to be here seven hours," and he replied: "There's been some sort of mixup—there are thousands of guys out there in the cold yelling to get in, and we have to take turns coming indoors."

I put on my shoes and started out, picking my way among the bodies that were lying all over the place. It took fifteen minutes to crawl out of the building; the hallway was perfect bedlam. Outside, the only other building was a latrine where men were lying on the floor with their heads resting under the stools. Crowds of people were yelling, screaming and stamping their feet to keep warm. It was an awful mess.

The Germans had made no provision whatever for feeding us, and our group was lucky to have the improvised sled; others had to throw away food after a while because they couldn't carry it any longer, and it was an awfully pathetic waste.

Fellows started building fires outdoors to warm their hands. They were tearing up log-books they had cherished for months and months in prison, painstaking sketches, poems and pasted German newspaper clippings, things like that—tearing them up by the handful to make fuel for fleeting warmth. We milled around there until six that night. It had been snowing all day, and it snowed so fast you couldn't see your hand before your face. We found an old boiler in the basement, and the kitchen sergeant built a fire and boiled water. We had some soluble coffee, and brother, I've never tasted anything half so delicious.

It turned out later that the Germans had planned for only two hundred prisoners to stop over in Friewaldau and had got some twenty-five hundred.

At six we were lined up again, counted and off we marched. The coffee had warmed us and we were feeling better about the whole thing, as well

as anyone could feel at twenty below in a baby blizzard. We were to march sixteen kilometers to another small town and there get warm shelter for the night. The column was stopping and starting constantly, a sort of accordion effect more galling than continuous marching. We hit town about two in the morning; the mercury had dropped still lower, but it had stopped snowing—a not unmitigated blessing because a high wind had come up. We draped blankets over our heads to keep from freezing, and I put on my Xmas gloves. I kept one hand inside my jacket and the other on the sled, swapping every five minutes.

The mayor of the town refused to take us in, so we had to keep going. With short stops, but no sleep, we walked all that day and the next, and the following night about ten o'clock we were passing through a lonely stretch of woods in the bright moonlight. Suddenly shots rang out, and we could hear bullets whine close by our ears. We hit the snow-deep ditch, piling on top of each other in a mad scramble. Some guy who had his head on my fanny had a pack on his back which stuck up above the ditch, and two cans of jam in it were opened by bullets.

It was cold, cold, cold, and we had to dig into the snow to keep down. There was something awfully personal about those rifle-shots; each sounded as though it was headed right for you. I made myself mighty small in that ditch. We had no idea what was going on, but there was a lot of shooting.

WE'D been burrowed in fifteen minutes when the firing ceased. Some guy next to me in the ditch embroidered the famous German query concerning trouble, "*Was ist los?*" He stuck his head up and hollered: "What the hell ist los?"

The guard, kneeling in the road with his rifle at his shoulder, called to us to come out. We got up on the road and ready to go—then, *bang!* it started again. I didn't bother to go to the ditch that time, just hit the road and started crawling on my belly to where the guard was. I figured that would be the safest place to be, thinking they wouldn't be shooting at each other.

Again the fuss subsided, we formed ranks and marched. Along the road we saw a body here and there, some Germans. A lot of wild rumors started, one that somebody had made a break and hid in the woods. I had seen somebody running for the woods, but I think he was trying to get out of the line of fire, not escape. It was a very illogical place to make a break; you'd freeze to death before you even found out where you were. Someone else said a guard had tripped and dis-

charged his rifle and the others started shooting. The most logical inference seemed to be that a local party of the Volksturm in the woods saw a column of men and took them for Russians—everybody was edgy about the Russians—fired to warn another group, and the two started shooting at each other.

By one in the morning everybody was in pretty bad shape. Feet were freezing, hands were freezing, and the whole situation was generally distressing. The guards wouldn't let us stop long enough to eat, and there was this continual accordion business of stop-start-stop every fifteen or twenty minutes. Every time we stopped, the runners of the sled froze, and we had to kick it to get it moving.

We were so damned tired we were getting silly. We knew we couldn't stop; because if we stopped, we'd sit down, and if we sat down we'd freeze, literally, right where we were. We took care of each other; when a guy tried to lie down, we kicked the hell out of him, slapped him around and started him going again.

Fairly strong, I was thanking God for my endurance and rallying these other guys along when it suddenly occurred to me that I was petering out. I began to feel warm, pleasant and drowsy, and I made the mistake of sitting down. I was completely at ease; I felt I had got home and was warm, no longer hungry, and everything was all right. Then some guy started slapping snow in my face, and I realized with a start that I'd better get moving around because I was freezing.

That went on all night. Now and again a guy dropped out, and we picked him up and carried him. One fellow said he had a Bible he wanted us to send to his mother, marking the place where he died because he wasn't going any farther.

Another fellow tried to leave the column and take off through the woods. We started yelling for him to come back, and the guard unslung his rifle. Another guy jumped in front of the guard and shouted, "Don't shoot! I'll bring him back!" and lit out after the first man. The poor crazed fool started swinging at the second guy, and we stood watching with our hearts in our mouths because we knew the guard was going to shoot them both. It ended with a couple of guards carrying the pair back to the line.

A group of stronger fellows—we called them Commandos—ran up and down the column all night long helping the boys who fell by the wayside. We had no wagons or anything like that; it was a matter of footpower all the way. Everybody helped everybody else. We wound up carrying several of our guards.

I remember going through one town about two in the morning where a Wehrmacht soldier stood in the street with a loaf of bread and tossed pieces to us as we went by. There was a churchyard, and kneeling before it was one of our men with a crucifix in his hand.

About six in the morning we reached Muscau, and the senior American officer in charge told the German leader we weren't moving any farther. "We've walked fifty-three hours," he said; "we've had nothing to eat, no shelter nor anything warm inside us. We can't go any farther. You might as well start shooting us—and you can start with me!"

THERE was a long delay while we stood packed in the town square. Everybody was half crazy; I know I was crying for no reason at all, just on a jag, with the tears freezing on my cheeks and streaking my face with blisters. They located some factories and churches where we could be quartered.

Our group drew a pottery plant to hole up in. One of our group of fifteen disappeared; two hours later we found him unconscious just inside one of the doorways—the heat had knocked him out. We carried him into a small area we'd reserved, rolled out our blankets and broke out some food, abandoning all idea of rationing. We ate and rolled up on the floor and went to sleep.

I guess we slept thirty hours. When I woke and tried to stand up, I fell down again; my feet were swollen and so tender I couldn't bear to put my weight on them. We were in a factory with twelve hundred men sleeping all over the place, between kilns and everything else, and those who were awake had to crawl on their hands and knees from one place to another because no one could walk.

We stayed there three days. The medical fellows were wonderful; they did a magnificent job. Some boys had to be taken to a hospital, and several lost feet that had been too badly frozen to save.

We pulled out again the second of February, but only had to hike eighteen kilometers. We stayed in barns along the way that night, and the next afternoon we made Spremburg, where they put us in a Wehrmacht camp in a big cement warehouse jammed with American prisoners. By that time I was finished for life with walking; I'd had enough.

About eight that night the RAF came over, and the lights went out. Just five minutes before the alarm I'd started to make my way to the latrine, and I was trapped in pitch blackness in the middle of a sea of humanity. I was so tired I wanted to lie down and

go to sleep, but there just wasn't room. I had one foot in the crook of a guy's elbow and the other in another fellow's crotch. The raid lasted two hours.

The first German ration we'd had was soup in Spremburg, and I said the hell with it, I was too tired, I was going to sleep. The other fellows, except one pretty badly crippled guy, went for soup, and they brought some back to us. A rich barley mixture with horsemeat in it, the stuff really tasted wonderful. We each consumed about a gallon and fell off to sleep.

The next day they hauled us out and said they were going to put us on a train for Nuremberg. A Wehrmacht guy wearing glasses, considerably older than the average German soldier, delivered himself of the damndest speech I've ever heard. He said: "I am going to give the news!" He recited, word for word, the Wehrmacht communiqué of the previous day, as though he'd written it himself. Then he launched into a harangue about how nine American Armies were on the West bank of the Rhine playing baseball while a shattering horde of Russians poured into Germany, forty miles from Berlin.

"After all," he declaimed, "you're smart fellows. You can see what's coming. Those nine American Armies aren't going to stop the Russians; they're going to keep on going. Why don't you wise up? We can all fight together! We have one common enemy—Russia!" He cheered and boomed and laughed to beat all hell.

From Spremburg we walked four or five miles to a railroad junction and clambered into boxcars, sixty to a car. European boxcars aren't exactly what you'd call spacious, and with sixty guys to a car, there just wasn't enough room to sit down. We knew enough about German railroads by then to know we were likely to be there a long time; so we fashioned hammocks of blankets and strung them across the car to get enough men off the floor so all could lie down. We were there three days. They gave us some Red Cross parcels, and so we had enough to eat, but water was a big problem.

WE spent a lot of time on sidings; for some reason we weren't strafed. Every other thing on wheels in Germany was getting it about then. We reached Nuremberg and took a short walk to the camp—and were more than a little dismayed to find it was right next to a marshaling yard.

The Germans told us we were going to be there four or five days, but the first night was enough to sell us on the idea of getting out. The RAF came over that night and bombed the yards, and the show they put on was

simply terrific. They dropped flares, and flak guns all around the edges of the camp set up an ear-shattering clamor, dropping spent flak on our roof and burning large holes.

Our first night there we went to bed early. About eleven o'clock the Major in charge of our particular unit came in and yelled: "I've got an important announcement to make!" Everybody thought: "My God, the war's over, this is wonderful." "Shake that man next to you!" he called. "I have something you must hear, it's important that everyone wake up."

We were primed to burst into cheers at that point. Then he said: "I have just received word that anybody who leaves the barracks for any reason whatever will be shot!" Somebody said, "Aw, hell," and started to go back to sleep. The Major continued: "If you have to go to the toilet, use the can at the end of the building. There's no light there, but you are not to leave the building until five A.M. under any circumstances!"

Just as he finished talking, the raid started. All the time we were there, we were being bombed or strafed by the British or the Americans, while we were held in flimsy wooden barracks at the point of a gun. I didn't mind so much the American raids—nobody did, because they were daylight affairs and we figured they could see what they were doing. But the night raids—oh, man!

There were a number of British officers in the camp, RAF boys. I got so nervous about these night raids I was plumb neurotic. I just dreaded to see the sun go down because I knew that as soon as it did, all hell was going to bust loose—and it did. I argued with myself that it was silly; people had lived there four years and undergone that sort of thing; but I didn't help myself very much. So I used to talk to these RAF guys and ask them how they did it, just to get a little encouragement, because they seemed pretty confident.

One night a couple of Mosquitoes came in like two scalded cats. They got in so fast that the air-raid siren didn't go off until they'd dropped their bombs. The first we heard was the bombs, then screams and more bombs. One of them must have had a slight malfunction in the bomb-rack, because a four-thousand-pounder dropped just inside our gate and moved the whole barracks sixteen inches off its foundation.

A guy by the name of Doc Filber was there from our original group of fifteen. There was a tremendous concussion; everybody hit the floor, and glass fell all over the place. I heard Doc say: "I had a sandwich, and I don't know whether I ate it, or dropped it!" That was a tragedy, be-

cause food was mighty scarce. Even if he'd eaten the sandwich without realizing it, it was a tragedy, because we couldn't afford to waste things that way.

The morning after, I asked one of the RAF boys, "Do you fellows carry those twelve-thousand-pounders in this deep?" He said: "Well, we carried them to Dresden—that's two hundred miles deeper. But of course, it has to be a pretty important target."

THOSE twelve-thousand-pound bombs look like railroad tank-cars—not the routine bomb shape, just a barrel full of nitroglycerine. They flatten everything within a mile or two of where they hit, and if you're above ground in that area, the concussion collapses your lungs. They're terrific. Well, that didn't do anything for my nerves at all. If a four-thousand-pounder had moved the barracks, something three times as big would be pretty rough.

Colonel Alkyre, our senior American officer, protested that the Geneva Convention provided that we not be quartered within fifty miles of a primary military target. He insisted that if the Germans couldn't live up to that provision, we should be interned in Switzerland. It didn't do any good.

Everything about that place was wrong. They had no food to speak of, no way to heat the barracks, and twenty-five hundred men had to use one tap for washing. The Colonel asked permission for us to dig slit trenches. It was refused. After about a dozen raids, he told the German commanding officer: "We're going to dig slit trenches. You can shoot us if you want to, but we're going to dig those trenches, and at two o'clock tomorrow I'm going to send the men out to start."

The Germans finally gave permission, but they wouldn't give us any tools; so we dug trenches with spoons and knives and tin cans. You can dig a hell of a hole with a spoon if you want it badly enough. Within two days we had shelters of a sort for everybody in the camp. The Germans said we could use them, provided we went to the trenches at the beginning of an alert and stayed until the all-clear. Going back and forth in between was *verboten*.

It was an awful job to figure out when to go to the trenches. One day we had ninety-six alerts, some for fighter sweeps or bomber formations going to a nearby target. Finally we arranged so that when a main effort was coming toward Nuremberg the Germans would call us, and our bugler would blow *Charge*.

Two months went by and finally, the American offensive started in ear-

nest. Again we thought, they couldn't move us now; they didn't have the guards or equipment. But the order came down to get ready to move, and sure enough, we were on our way. This time we were given some twelve hours' notice, as well as definite assurance that American officers would be in charge of the march and there would be none of this business of walking for fifty-three hours; we were to hike fifty minutes, rest ten, and every three hours knock off for a half-hour's rest.

I was glad to get out of that place; it was getting on my nerves something awful. We started off, a column of some eighty-five hundred, with our group near the front. No sooner were we out of Nuremberg than the Eighth Air Force came over in force and really blew the place to bits.

The first day on the road we walked about twenty miles, putting up that night in barns and private homes. We started trading with the civilians, giving them cigarettes for food, and it got to be just one big game, the guard gave up trying to control us. As we walked along someone would dash into a farmhouse and call "*Haben Sie Brot? Haben Sie Eier?*" and come back with bread or eggs or both.

We were having a good time and we started stalling, trying to delay long enough for the American troops to catch up. We had been assured that our senior officer had some sort of deal cooking with the Luftwaffe, that we were to be captured and in turn we'd secure for them preferential treatment. We also had been ordered by our officers not to try to escape.

We stalled and stalled and stalled, but still no American troops. In the middle of the night we reached a town called Berching. It was raining pitchforks, they had no facilities to care for us, there was no place for us to sleep. I was standing there in the rain feeling thoroughly tired and miserable and I thought, "The hell with this! I'm going to hole up some place."

I walked over to a house, knocked on the door and was let in by a woman who turned out to have a son missing in action on the West Front. Very sympathetic, she gave me something to eat and a bowl of hot water to wash my face. I plumped myself down and went to sleep.

NEXT day I found a butcher. He seemed like a good character to know so I gave him four packs of cigarettes as a bribe to hide me until our column moved out. I was going to wait until everyone had gone and then wander five or ten kilometers away and wait for our troops.

Actually, I made this deal through the butcher's wife. While I was sitting in the kitchen talking to her, I saw a kid about twelve years old stick his head around the door and the lady of the house signaled me to keep quiet. About fifteen minutes later there was a great pounding on the door. Seems the kid was working for a merit badge or something in the Hitler Jugend, and he had turned me in. They hauled me back to the line of march, and off we went for three or four days more, trading like mad, sleeping in barns at night and generally having a picnic.

We went down to Moosburg, where we were to be incarcerated temporarily. We learned later that we were to have been among twenty-seven thousand British and American air officers taken into the Bavarian Alps and held as hostages.

We had a radio that the British guys pieced together from tubes, condenser, wire and whatnot salvaged by the boys when they hit the silk, and we heard over it that General Eisenhower had issued an order for the Germans to stop moving American prisoners and getting them shot up by our own planes, or take the consequences. The Germans entered into an agreement through the Swiss that they would not move us provided we would not be used in the European theater of war after our release. That was silly because they wouldn't have used us anyway, but it gave some German a chance to save face.

That was April twenty-fifth. For us it was the eve of freedom, but we couldn't let on that we knew because we weren't supposed to have that radio. Two days later the Germans announced the agreement. We got a radio message addressed to us:

"If any attempt is made to move you, set fire to something at two o'clock tomorrow afternoon. Make enough smoke so it will be recognized from the air." About a quarter-to-two the next day a squadron of P-51s flew over the camp and circled the rest of the afternoon. Then the Germans started to pack up and leave. Only a skeleton force remained.

The night of the twenty-eighth an American armored division pulled up on a hill about four kilometers away, and the senior British and American officers in our camp, a Swiss representative, the local S.S. commander and German commandant got in a car and drove over to confer with the American tank general. The commandant said he wanted to fight, and the American said: "You'd better figure out how you can do it without involving this camp. There are one-hundred-thousand Allied prisoners there, and if any of them get hurt you're going to pay for it."

The German officer replied: "Well, you give me forty-eight hours, and I will turn them over to you, all of them." Replied the American, "I'll give you forty-eight hours for nothing. In forty-eight hours you'll have troops here from all over Germany. That's silly! I'll tell you what I will do, though," he added, looking at his watch. "It's getting late. I won't move in until nine o'clock tomorrow morning. And at twelve o'clock tomorrow the American flag will be flying from your church steeple!"

We knew nothing of all this. That was Saturday night. Sunday morning we usually were awakened by a bugle at nine, but that morning we were hauled out at eight to get the parade over with before the shooting started. By half-past we were back in the tents.

PROMPTLY at nine — *wang-wang-wang-wang*—bullets came clipping through the tent and we started crawling for the air-raid shelters. The Americans faced the problem of capturing that town without using heavy artillery, and they did a wonderful job. At five minutes past noon the American flag went up on the church steeple, and we really started cheering. That was the twenty-ninth, and as far as I'm concerned, that was V-E Day. It was the greatest day of my life.

When the shooting stopped, a couple of Sherman tanks came busting into camp just to lift our morale—as though it needed any lifting. We swarmed over them and cheered. The next day, General Patton came in and made a little speech, and two days later they started hauling us out. I was lucky enough to be in the first battalion evacuated. We were taken to an airfield at Landschuh, some twenty miles away, and C-47s picked us up. How good those babies looked!

The ship I was on ran out of gas and limped into Paris on one engine, but nobody complained. The Red Cross was there with a clubmobile, ready with doughnuts and coffee. One guy, who had survived prison fare, ate thirty-five doughnuts and died that night in the hospital. I only ate sixteen.

We got to Le Havre May fourth (my birthday) and I just went all to pieces. They put me in a nice white bed in a nice clean hospital and in the afternoon a pretty Red Cross girl came up and gave me a shaving kit, tooth brush and so on. In it was a card: "*On behalf of the people of the United States of America, the American Red Cross extends warm greeting to liberated American Prisoners of War. In the name of your loved ones at home, we salute you for your sacrifices for them and your country.*"

I read that, and busted out crying.

My Most Amusing Experience

Conditions governing contributions for this department are the same as those for "What Do You Think?"

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THIS happened to me in northwestern Canada. It was a good while before I thought it was funny. I had a small herd of cattle and large ambitions, a homestead by a pretty lake and one red sow. The sow had ten pigs.

She wanted to share the freedom of the frontier, and got out of my pole pen. With her family she followed the shore of the lake, till she came to a deserted stable in some timber. There she established residence, with a mile of lake between us, while she fed on roots and an occasional dead fish.

However economical, the arrangement didn't seem right to me. But I left her there because it was seeding time, the busiest of the four busy seasons. The rule for the rancher was, "Six days shalt thou labor, and on the seventh do the odd jobs." So it was one noon of a sunny Sabbath as I rode in from my weekly look-up of my cattle that I stopped to drive the sow home. I tied my horse to an old corral, hung my fur chaps on the saddlehorn (fortunately, for they aren't good to swim in) and routed the sow and her brood out of the stable. By the time I had chased her out of several acres of rush, the ten pigs had gone ten ways, and I was hotter, madder and more stupidly stubborn than the hog. By golly, I'd drive her home!

Passing the horse and turning up the end of the lake where there was a sandy beach, the sow cooled herself by wading in the edge of the water. Then she was in deeper. Then she was swimming. Perhaps she thought to swim around me back to the stable. But her navigation wasn't good. Aghast, I saw the start of my future hog business, already low fore and aft.

No matter what the extremity, a cowboy in a tight place thinks first of his horse, and I legged it for mine—hoping, since the lake deepened very gradually, to wade him around this seagoing sow of mine. But I was still a couple rods behind her when the horse was swimming. I was heavy for him on the ground, more so when the gravel was ten feet below him, and I rode him down so deeply he didn't make much headway. I slid off and held the saddlehorn, stroking with one hand. Since the ice had left the lake only a week before, this was something to remember.

Now the horse could swim faster, but he didn't want to; he wanted to go ashore. My only authority was on my heels, so I had to get on him again to spur him.

It took a lot of those shifts in and out of the saddle to overhaul the sow, but at last we had shoed and crowded her back to where the horse was only

belly-deep. He was a willing bronc at cowpunching, but he was all fed up with sow-punching, and so he bucked. The sow got by us, and again headed for the deep blue water. I threw the horse away—well, somebody did some throwing—at least I was on the deep-water side of the sow once more; and there might as well be the fade-out—me shoulder-deep in ice-water, clutching to my bosom a three-hundred-pound female hog. . . .

The epilogue: I drove her toward her preferred stable when at last we got to shore. She brought her family to my house of her own accord a few days later.

J. P. L.

Cause for Laughter

WHEN I was a young man in college, I worked for three nights per week in a near-by club to help meet my educational expenses. One evening a stag organization of the city staged a smoker at the club, and I was hired to collect tickets at the door. Soon after the show got under way, the door suddenly burst open, and in stalked five burly patrolmen. Four of these men immediately stationed themselves at exits while the fifth walked to the center of the dance floor and stopped the show.

"All right now," he bellowed, taking a small notebook and pencil from his pocket. "In orderly fashion I want your right names and addresses."

From the back of the room came a sonorous voice: "And then what?"

"You'll appear at Justice Bisbing's office tomorrow morning at ten o'clock for a hearing," replied the patrolman.

A brief silence followed this announcement. Then suddenly the room exploded with uproarious laughter, and as though this laughter were a starter's gun at a race-track, men dashed wildly for the exits. A few were thrown back into the room by the patrolmen, but in the end all reached the outside and safety. Later in the evening I asked the owner of the club the reason for the laughter.

"My boy," he replied, "Justice Bisbing was sitting in the front row."

J. C. M.

MY most amusing experience took place during a period of five or six years. The school I was attending was both Junior High and Senior High. Being of an athletic mind, but of non-athletic physique, I was somewhat hesitant in trying out for the football team; but try I did. With all my heart and every muscle in my ninety-pound body, I tried to make the team. And soon I won a prominent position—right in the middle of the bench!

For six years I held that position: ever trying, never playing. Many times the coach would start to send me in a game but he would change his mind, saying, "Never mind, you might get hurt." Much too soon the final game of my senior year rolled around. The coach appointed me as water-boy. It burned me up. Why did he have to pick on me, a senior? Well, the game soon got started and the first quarter progressed rapidly. As I dashed out upon the field with the water, I was dreaming that I was dashing for a touch-down. A spectator yelled, "Ha! Ha! Look at Muscles, the star water-boy." I stopped dreaming.

The game went fast. There was just about five minutes left to play when the yelling started. A girl with a beautiful soprano voice sang out: "We want Muscles! We want Muscles!" She kept it up. Spectators took it up. Like wildfire, the yelling spread. Louder and stronger it grew. Somewhat dazed, I heard the coach call my name, telling me to warm up. I warmed up, listened to my instructions from the coach, and rushed into the game.

The opposing team had the ball. When play was resumed, they attempted a pass. One of their ends shot past me. The ball came hurtling, high, down the field. It was going over my head! I leaped. The ball hit the tip of my fingers, bounced into the air, then fell into my arms. Some eighty yards away lay the goalposts. I aimed for them. Just as I crossed the goal, the gun went off. The game had ended. After the extra point had been completed, the stands exploded. The stands overflowed upon the field. Someone lifted me high in the air upon their shoulders. Right behind the band, in the traditional snake-dance, we marched down the field. The band played, the spectators sang, "For He's a Jolly Good Fellow." I grinned, through tears and all. I caught a glimpse of the coach. He winked at me.

Two years later, I married the girl with the beautiful soprano voice.

W. Thomas Grogan

WE CAME to the VILLAGE

HERE from the west bank of the Oder, one almost sees Berlin. Not many miles, not many days remain before us now. These last years, the way has been long. But Alex and I have come the long way together, and comradeship is a good thing.

We have been comrades since we were boys. Our border village was a headquarters for one of the kolkhozes, or collective farms. Alex lived with his uncle, Fyodor Bukhin, across October Street from my mother's house. And even in those times, everybody in the village knew that Alex loved his black-eyed cousin Mila Bukhinskaya.

The first conversation Alex and I ever had took place in the middle of the street. I stood there, while he and Mila advanced toward me. In the way of children, we looked at each other a long time silently. Then Alex blurted: "My name is Alex. My mother and father are dead. I live with my Uncle Fyodor. He is superintendent of the kolkhoze."

"I know that," I said.

Everybody knew that. Fyodor Bukhin had the best house in town. It was a well-built frame structure of two stories. And it was given new paint often.

"This is my cousin Mila Bukhinskaya," Alex went on. "When I grow up, I am going to marry her."

I said, "I know that," though it was the first I had heard of it.

"This is the finest village in the Soviet," Alex contended. "And Uncle Fyodor's house is the finest house in the village."

"I know that," I said.

And so, when we met at Taganrog in November, 1941, it was quite natural that Alex should speak again of Uncle Fyodor and Cousin Mila, the village and the house. Alex was a replacement for our company, which had been retreating since summer. We fell back together on Rostov and then across the Don, defeat freshening our comradeship.

There was never much clapping of shoulders or shouting of "Tovarich!" between us; Alex was too self-contained for that. But, in advance and

retreat alike, both of us quietly accepted our nearness.

After Marshal Timoshenko assumed command, we went back over the river and recaptured Rostov. Alex insisted that we inspect the ruins of the *Selmashstroi*, the great factory where farm implements had been made.

Alex said: "I have always wanted to see this place. Many of our tractors came from here."

"I know that," I said.

But I tried to be patient, while he told me again how well Uncle Fyodor had managed the kolkhoz. He predicted a bright future for himself and Mila, when they married and worked the land. He said the village was the finest in the Soviet, and would fight hardest against the invaders who now occupied it. He said his house was the finest in the village.

But he was silent when we hurried on in pursuit of the enemy. The fierceness of Alex in battle seemed strange. It was incongruous with his appearance. He was a fair boy, with light hair and plump pink cheeks. But I grew accustomed to his ferocity.

While we were advancing west of Rostov, Alex first spoke the words which were later to be adopted by the whole company. We had retaken a small settlement in which not one stick remained standing. It was the first complete ruin we had seen. Alex looked at it and said, with combined cheer and anger: "This town has died for the Soviet."

It was only a little beyond that place, just short of Taganrog, that the offensive bogged down. We stayed there the rest of the winter and until the enemy's spring drive began. While the front was frozen, there was time for memory. Alex remembered the heroic look of the ruined settlement. He said: "Our village, too, is fighting. When we retake it, we will find it in ruins too."

"I know that," I said.

It was no mere perverseness that made him want to see his village destroyed. It was a matter of pride with him. In retaliation for a patriotic Soviet act, the invaders would level some portion of a town. Thus a completely leveled town represented to



Alex a completeness of patriotism. He talked much of that during the winter.

But the summer gave us no leisure for talking. Those were the sleepless nights and days. We retreated from Rostov, from the Don, from the steppes, from Stalingrad, and then across the Volga before we could hold.

Then we stood firm. It was a long autumn. But at last we forded the Volga and fought in the streets of Stalingrad. It was there that we first knew hope.

FIVE of us were in a cellar. We fired through holes punched in the rubble of the house. A few blocks away, enemy troops were trying to cross the street, one by one. We picked them off as they ran.

At length there was a delay as we waited for new targets. For a moment Alex thrust his head out of a hole and looked around. Hearing the spitting of a sniper's rifle, he brought



A vivid drama of 1945 Russia

by Paul
Hughes

Illustrated by
Grattan Condon

Alex would then come to me, and he would always say: "Our village has fought well too. It is also a ruin. We will recapture it one day. We will see your mother and my Uncle Fyodor and Cousin Mila."

"I know that," I would reply.

This said, we would hurry on to the next town, where everything would look the same, and the same things would happen—until all towns were one town, and all ruins merged into one long nightmare of ruin.

WE were awakened from the dream the day we entered the district where Alex and I and most of the company had lived before the war. Towns began to seem somehow more personal. We were less immune. When a numbed survivor gathered the courage to speak, the tongue was more familiar. Even the strangers in our company called it "our district."

We recaptured the village where a corporal had lived. The streets were unrecognizable, even to him. But he counted the buildings until he was sure he had found the remains of his own home. He searched in the embers and discovered the bodies of his wife and two children. Then, rejoining the company, he pointed toward the place and said: "This house has died for the Soviet!"

Thereafter, at almost every town there was some soldier who would go among the ruins and return to make the same proclamation, half in pride and half in agony. Then, our strength renewed, we would sweep on.

Every advance that brought us nearer our own village made Alex more impatient. Finally, about two days from the town, Alex came to me and said: "I can't bear it any longer. I am going to ask the captain's permission to go ahead."

"What for?"

"The town has fought well. I must see it. It is what we have dreamed about all these months."

"I know that."

"Then come with me. We will ask the captain to put us on a patrol. We can go over the hills, and be in sight of the town by morning."

his head back in. And he said, smiling: "This city has died for the Soviet."

The others echoed him. It was only a few hours until the words infected the whole company. They have followed us ever since, across the steppes and rivers, in sun and snow.

After Stalingrad, the words were spoken more frequently. We were flailing the enemy before us, out of the Caucasus, out of the Crimea, out of the Ukraine. I think that men had never made before such desolation as we saw during the advance. We freed more devastated villages than I could count, but they were all so similar in their desolation that now they form a pattern in my mind.

As we approached a town, the gaunt and bearded partisans, wearing their quilted jackets and carrying their old-style rifles, would always pour out of the woods or down from the hills to meet us. There would be some little clasp of hands and shedding of

tears. There would be the clenched fist upheld, and perhaps a singing of "Meadowland."

Then the partisans would turn over to us any prisoners they might have. They would tell us the disposition of troops in the town, and we would attack accordingly. And when we had taken the village, there would be street on street of wreckage and twisted bodies. Out of the wreckage would crawl a few withered old people and children, staring at us mutely.

Those who had been in animal hiding during the occupation would creep back into the town, a few at a time. There would be cheering, but the longer the town had been occupied, the less cheering there would be.

Someone in the company, despite the thousand other ruined villages he had seen, would still feel pity and courage. He would say, in sorrow so deep it was almost joy: "This town has died for the Soviet!" The others would echo him.

"Everything in good time," I said. "But your mother is there. And my Uncle Fyodor and Cousin Mila. We've been fighting for a lot of things. But the principal thing is the town."

"I know that."

"Then let's go."

"No," I said. "We will keep our places and go in with the others."

He was almost out of his mind with expectancy. I am sure he had not slept in many days. He protested for a long time, but at last I persuaded him.

We marched all the next day and most of the night, but the advance was too slow to satisfy Alex. And he was still more excited the following morning when, only four *vershs* from the town, the partisans emerged to welcome us.

Their leader was a little old man with a dried and furrowed face. Even so, he could swagger. He clasped few hands and shed no tears. It was plain he was not deferring to the regulars.

OUR captain offered the old man a bottle of cheap vodka. Refusing, the partisan chief handed the captain some expensive enemy brandy, and the captain drank it.

The captain asked: "And how are things in the town?"

"Very good," the old man said.

"And what of the disposition of the enemy troops?"

All the partisans laughed.

The old man explained: "There are no enemy troops—since last night."

"Good! Good! What happened?"

The partisans all laughed again.

"It was only a raid," the old man said. "That is, we meant it for only a raid. We intended to kill a few and capture a few and then withdraw. But it was so easy that we decided to stay. They set fire to what was left, and then evacuated the town."

"Good! Good! What did you get in the way of prisoners?"

"The three we wanted," the old man smiled.

Partisan guards brought the three and lined them up in front of the captain. The old man gestured toward each in turn as he spoke.

"This forlorn one," he said, "is Major Schleicher. He was the *Gauleiter*, the one who executed fifty people and destroyed twenty houses the day after the crops burned in the fields.

"The other two are former Russians who helped and sheltered him. This handog one is Fyodor Bukhin. He used to manage the farms for us. He managed the farms for them, too. And this painted one is his daughter Mila Bukhinskaya. She used to be very friendly to us. So she was—very friendly to them, too."

Alex was quite near. He watched and listened. He endured it rather

well, I thought, except that his face turned white. He took a few steps toward Mila and looked at her, saying nothing. She gave a slight gasp of recognition, then was silent.

He examined her slowly, from foot to head. She was well-kept. Her clothes were modish, her complexion clear. The black eyes snapped almost as brightly as they had in her childhood. She was clean. Her hair was combed.

Then he looked over at some of the partisan women near by. Most of them were dressed in men's clothing, and it was ragged. They seemed formless, almost sexless. They had ammunition-belts on their shoulders. And they were dirty.

He looked back at her. She understood.

Alex turned from her. He gave his Uncle Fyodor only a glance. He resumed his place in the company. We began the short last lap of our march into town.

I expected some expression of regret from Alex, but there was none. One would hardly have guessed that anything had happened. This seemed so unnatural under the circumstances that I could not restrain myself from speaking.

"How do you feel?" I asked.

"I feel fine," Alex said.

"I'm very glad. I was afraid—"

"It's all right. It was a shock only at first. If a thing is true, then it is good to know it, isn't it?"

"Yes, of course, but—"

"Very well, then. Uncle Fyodor and Cousin Mila are traitors. That is a true thing, and it is good to be aware of it."

He marched along, his eyes straight ahead. Only the occasional flexing of the muscles of his jaw revealed any emotion. I marched beside him, watching him. And so we came to the village.

There was the same calm silence of death. There was the same complete wreckage. There were the same wizened old people and children crawling from the ruins to look at us without speech. And after a time, the same animal-like refugees, who had lived in the forest during the years, crept back into town.

YET everything was different. This was our village. These were our people.

"The town fought well," Alex told me.

"I know that," I said.

"Many died here. It fought as hard as any village in the Soviet. Perhaps even harder."

We walked down streets where only the general arrangement was familiar to us. There was no longer any contour of houses and outbuildings, trees



Alex examined her

and flowers. And we were silent as we approached our own neighborhood on October Street.

My house was gone, like the others. It was almost indistinguishable in the general *débris*. From an old woman who crawled out of a hovel, I drew the story. My mother had starved to death a year and a half ago, and had been buried near by. I could go and look at the grave if I liked.

I did not go. I stood and imagined the house as it had been when I was a child, when my father and mother were both alive. I remembered playing in the street before the house. And at last I understood, more fully than I had ever understood before, what the others had meant when they shouted the words.



slowly. . . . Then he looked at the partisan women near by. . . . He looked back at her. She understood.

In pride and sorrow, I pointed in the direction of my fallen home and said: "This house has died for the Soviet!"

Then I turned to speak to Alex. He was standing, silent and anguished, across the street. I have never seen a man so wracked with hopelessness.

For Alex' house was intact.

It showed no damage. There were no bullet-holes, no mark of fire. It had quite recently been painted. It was a comfortable, a luxurious house. And Alex stood and stared at it.

Then he glanced up and down both sides of the street. There was no other house upright. There were only the long, jagged lines of burned, broken wood and masonry. In all the jetsam of the village, only Alex' house was fresh and unscarred.

And he uttered a cry such as I had never heard from a man before. The look he gave me was that of one who has suddenly been emptied of every vital thing. He sobbed loudly. He hid his face on his arm.

In a moment, he gestured to me. I followed; we went into his house together; we went through every room.

The furniture was clean and in good repair. The beds were made. There was food, carefully ordered, in the kitchen. There were the remains of a recent fire in the hearth, and beside it the wood was neatly stacked. In the dining-room were the polished chairs and table, and the rows of well-washed dishes.

And Alex and I were smothered. It was an obscene tomb. There was no soul in that house.

Alex went on wandering about the rooms. Intermingled with the articles he had known since childhood were a few effects of Major Schleicher—flags, pictures, papers. Alex, almost suffocating, looked at all these things.

At last it was finished. To my great relief, he led me out of the place. We stood in the street. And Alex, pointing, shouted in a voice that was full of tears:

"This house, too, has died for the Soviet Union!"

"I know that," I said.

Not far away was a building whose ruins were still smoking. Alex went to it, and in a moment returned, carrying a burning stick in his bare hands. He ran inside his home with it; I let him go alone.

Big Jim Comes Ridin'

YES sir, 'twas up in the Wind River country that Big Jim was foaled—there where the men all grow eighteen hands high, an' every baby cowpuncher uses a six-gun handle for a teethin'-ring.

Big Jim, he was a rip-snortin' son-of-a-gun right from the start. His mother took one look at him, an' she sang him this song, kind o' sad:

*You're just a baby cowboy,
An' you'll die as the cowboy dies.
You was born to be a killer,
'Cause I see it in your eyes.*

An' so Big Jim, that was Little Jim then, kept a-growin' an' a-growin', until presently he was most as good a puncher as his daddy. He could ride, rope, an' shoot with any cowboy on the Lazy K Bar, an' he had two notches on his gun-handle before he was a twelve-year-old.

One day his daddy called him: "Little Jim!" said he. An' Jim got so mad he couldn't scarcely see. The blue fire jumped right out of his eyes.

"I aint Little Jim no more," he said. "From now on—

*"I'm Big Jim Turner, from the Lazy K Bar,
I aim to spread my loop afore I git far.
I'm a pizen Gila monster from out of the sky,
I'm a ridin' son o' thunder on the fly."*

With that his daddy looked at him kind o' sad-like, an' he saw it wasn't any use to argue. So he said: "I seen it comin', son. It's the itchin' foot, like I had when I came out from ol' Kaintuck'. You wasn't never born to die with your boots off. So go spread your loop, son, an' don't ever wear a glove on your right hand. From now on you're Big Jim Turner, from the Lazy K Bar."

So Big Jim went into the ranch-house, an' greased up his boots with bear-grease, an' went out to catch up his blue roan mare that was smarter than most men an' could turn on a dime. Jim drew his six-gun faster than a man can see. He shot once, half an inch to the side of the right front ear of his mare, an' she came a-runnin' like a streak of light.

Jim said nary word, but turned an' walked back to the pole corral, his blue roan mare a-followin' him like a little lamb. He threw his silver-mounted center-fire saddle on her, buckled on his chaps, an' was plumb ready for to pull his freight. He took a last look around the home ranch,

an' then turned to the mare, throwed a leg across her, and sang:

*Foot in the stirrup,
An' a hand on the horn,
Best damn' cowboy
Ever was born!*

Big Jim lit out south, his blue roan mare a-eatin' up the miles on a runnin' walk. He was pretty sad for a while about leavin' the old Lazy K Bar, but the birds were all a-makin' music, an' the spring sun was a-shinin', an' the breeze singin' through the jack-pines in the little cañons. So pretty soon he perked up an' began to listen to the saddle-leather a-creakin' under him kind o' rhythmical. He looked right handsome, too, with his chest a-swellin' out underneath his beaded vest, an' the silver conchas on his chaps shinin' in the sun.

Well, sir, Big Jim rode along on his blue roan mare that was smarter than most men an' could make sixty miles a day an' never turn a hair. Never a soul did he see exceptin' for stray cow-brutes an' coyotes till along about sundown, when he saw the town of Thirty-Mile below him. He cut off the main road, an' came slidin' right down the bluff that overhung the town. The citizens watched him comin' in a cloud of dust, an' wondered at the color of his blue roan mare.

An' that, folks, is how:

Big Jim Turner came a-ridin' down the trail

*With his silver spurs a-jinglin'
An' the Devil on his tail.*

He didn't have a dollar an' his throat was full o' dust,

*He was lookin' for excitement,
'Cause his gun was like to rust.*

Jim left his horse standin' outside the First Chance Saloon, an' went a-stridin' in. He didn't have but a lone four-bit piece in his pocket, but he was born lucky an' knew it, so he matched the bartender for a drink an' won. The barkeeper got out his toughest forty-rod, an' poured out four fingers, just to test Jim out. But Jim took her down an' never blinked an eye. First he tried a black-jack game, an' ran up quite a stake. He was wonderin' at his good luck, so it didn't surprise him any when a dance-hall girl called Lou motioned him inside. She told him the game was crooked, an' that they were buildin' him for a fall, thinkin' he had a roll.

So Jim cashed his chips, an' went out to see that his blue roan mare was

taken care of. When he came back in, he saw that a gambler named Smithy, who laid a claim to Lou, was workin' himself up with whisky, an' eyin' him. Jim laughed in his face.

"I'm Big Jim Turner, from the Lazy K Bar," he said. "I'm a large curly wolf, an' it's my night to howl. I'm a ridin' son o' thunder, Mr. Smith, an' if you crave to call my hand, there aint no better time than right now."

Smithy went for his derringer like a scared antelope jumpin' out of the brush, but Jim drew from the hip so fast you couldn't see him move. There was only one shot, an' presently Jim was filin' another notch on his gun.

WELL, Big Jim camped in Thirty-Mile for two-three days, makin' a play for the girl called Lou; but she saw she wasn't the kind for a fellow like him. "Big Jim," said she, "I've seen your kind before. Your itchin' foot'll carry you into far places, an' your nervous gun-hand will land you in lots o' trouble. This is goin' to sound strange, comin' from a girl like me, but you're a fine upstandin' feller, an' here is a little advice:

*"Jest take a little tip from me:
Of evils in this world there are three.
So stay away from cards an' likker,
But a skirt'll get you quicker,
'Cause a woman's always prone to
jealousie."*

With that she kissed him an' sent him ridin' off south on his blue roan mare, his chaps a-flappin' in the breeze. An' that's how Big Jim Turner got his first lesson in stayin' away from gamblin', women, an' whisky.

Well, Jim kept a-driftin' along, with no particular place to go, an' no special time to get there. Daytimes the changin' scenery kept him interested, an' at nightfall the coyotes sang him to sleep from the hill-tops. Finally the money he'd won gave out, an' said he: "Blue, we can't ride the grub-line no longer. We got to get us a job." So his mare nickered to show she'd understood, an' took off across the country on her runnin' walk. Presently they came to a ranch-house, an' there was a big crowd of punchers standin' round the corral. Inside the corral there was a big rangy bay outlaw stallion a-kickin' an' a-rarin', an' the puncher on top of him was pullin' leather for all he was worth. All his pullin' did him no good, though, because presently the cinch broke, an' the puncher an' the saddle went a-

by Ben Newcomer

sailin' plumb out of the corral, to land flat in the dust.

Standin' alongside the fence was a dark-haired, likely-lookin' girl, about nineteen or twenty. Big Jim took one look at her, an' his heart went a-flutterin' in his chest like a new-hatched sage-chicken. The girl's eyes were a-blazin'.

"If none of you so-called broncbusters can ride old Diablo, I'll ride him myself!" she said.

Big Jim heard her, an' climbed down from his blue roan mare. It took him just three strides to walk over.

"I'm Big Jim Turner," said he, "from the Lazy K Bar. I'm a ridin' buster from up in the Wind River country where the men all grow eighteen hands high. I kin ride anything that's got four legs an' wears hair, an' I aint goin' to stand by while a woman rides a outlaw broomtail."

The men standin' round looked kind o' sheepish as Jim took down his braided buckskin lariar.

Inside of a minute an' a half Big Jim had thrown his saddle on the bay outlaw, an' had climbed aboard. Well sir, then there was such a ride as you never heard tell of. That outlaw horse sun-fished an' crow-hopped an' swapped ends, a-squealin' at every jump. He bucked across the corral an' back again ten times, but Big Jim rode him straight up an' rolled a cigarette in the air, a-smilin' easy-like all the time. Finally the wicked look went out of the outlaw's eyes, an' Jim shouted: "Open the gate!"

So Jim rode old Diablo out of the gate, an' he was just as docile as a little lamb. "Here's your bronc, ma'am," said he to the dark-haired girl, 'lightin' down an' handin' her the reins.

"Big Jim Turner," said she, "you've rode your way into a job on my ranch any time you want it. My name is Conchita, an' I want to say that we never saw a prettier rider than you hereabouts."

"Ceptin' mebbe Pecos Bill, from down Texas way," put in one of the men.

"Who is this here Pecos Bill?" inquired Big Jim, a-frownin'. "If there's a better man on this or any other range, I want to meet him!"

So they all gathered round an' told him all about Pecos Bill, the wild puncher of the Rio Grande, who was raised with the wolves, an' used a rattlesnake for a quirt. They told him

*"I seen Pecos Bill
ridin' hell-fer-
leather on his griz-
zly bear, down a
ridge. He was run-
nin' down a tim-
ber wolf, and the
poor brute was
yelpin' in terror."*

how Pecos Bill couldn't find a horse big enough to mount him, so he went out an' caught a grizzly bear for a cowpony. They told him how whenever Bill wanted a light for his cigarette, he hit a piece of granite with his fist until the sparks flew, an' how he was greased lightnin' with a six-gun.

"Well," said Jim, "I got a hankerin' to meet up with this here Pecos Bill feller." But he took another look at Conchita, an' her eyes were a-pleadin' with him, so he decided to stay on awhile. So after that, Big Jim rode out with the punchers every morning, an' did the work of three ordinary men. Pretty soon whenever Conchita's cattle heard him comin', they'd all bunch up an' come a-runnin', because they knew it wasn't any use to run away. Life got to be pretty much all the same for Big Jim, exceptin' when he an' Conchita would go walkin' under the big yellow moon at night.

THINGS were pretty dull—that is, until the Chisholm Kid started in to rustlin' Conchita's cattle. Now, a lot of you folks have heard lies concernin' how the Kid was killed, but it wasn't any sheriff that got the Chisholm Kid. It was Big Jim Turner, from the Lazy K Bar, like the song says:

*The Chisholm Kid, he fanned his gun,
An' he roamed both wide an' far.
No livin' man could face him 'neath the
shinin' sun
But Big Jim Turner, of the Lazy K Bar.*

Yes sir, Big Jim had the Indian sign on the Kid for fair, but still Conchita's cattle kept disappearin'. So Jim sent the Chisholm Kid a challenge, sayin' that he was a yellow-bellied snake if he didn't show up in the town of Big Springs on a certain day. Of course no self-respectin' bad-man could turn down a challenge like that, so the Kid was there all right when Big Jim came ridin' in on his blue roan mare, with Conchita followin' on old Diablo, unbeknownst to him. Jim was a-walkin' down the main street, free



an' easy-like, when the Kid stepped out through the doors of the Oro y Plata Saloon behind him, an' got the drop on him.

"Big Jim," said he, "yore ridin'-days is over. You may be a ridin' son o' thunder from the Wind River country, but you're goin' to eat hot lead!"

Just then Conchita came ridin' up from behind, an' called out to the Kid, real sudden-like. He turned his eyes a second, an' Big Jim drew like lightnin', to drop him in the dust. An' that's the straight of how the Chisholm Kid was killed.

Conchita came runnin' up, cryin', to put her arms around Big Jim, but he'd have nothin' to do with her. He was mad as a longhorn steer on the prod. "I'm Big Jim Turner, an' a fightin' fool," said he. "I'll have you to understand that I don't need no woman to help me when I go gunnin'. Besides which, my feet are itchin', an' I crave to meet up with this Pecos Bill I hear so much about." So Big Jim left Conchita cryin' there in the street, an' struck out for the Rio Grande.

As he rode southward, the country got wilder an' wilder, an' the people were few an' far between. Even the cattle were scrawny, an' seemed to run all to horns. Every place Jim stopped, the people marveled at his size, an' at the color of his blue roan mare, but none of 'em seemed to know where he could meet up with Pecos Bill. They all told him that Bill was a sure'nough bad *hombre*, however, an' always lookin' for trouble.

Finally Big Jim got over into the wild country across the Pecos River, an' rode into the last of the cow-camps one night. He made his usual inquiry, an' the foreman asked him to 'light an' eat.

"So you're Big Jim Turner," said the foreman, "an' you're lookin' for Pecos Bill. Well, I seen him ridin'

hell-fer-leather on his grizzly bear, down a ridge west of here yesterday morning. He was runnin' down a timber wolf, an' the poor brute was yelpin' in terror at every jump."

"I seen him the day before," said another one of the punchers, "up in the timber. He was mad, an' clearin' out a path with his bare hands. The jack-pines was a-fallin' right an' left, like wheat-stalks in a hailstorm, an' the ground was tremblin' like as if a herd of steers was stampedin'. Unless you come peaceable, Big Jim, you'd better climb right back in the middle of your blue roan mare, an' high-tail it back up to the Wind River country."

Well sir, Jim 'lowed he was goin' to have a run-in with Pecos Bill, no matter what happened. "'Cause," said he, "I'm a pizen Gila monster from the sky. I'm a ridin' son o' thunder on the fly, an' there's no man livin' can face me down. I cut my teeth on a six-gun handle, an' my mother used to feed me rattlesnakes for breakfast, regular." The cowpunchers saw it was no use to argue with him, because he was as dead set on trouble as a bay outlaw comin' out of the buckin' chute. So they bedded him down for the night, an' he got up the next mornin', a-rarin' an' full of fight.

HE climbed aboard his blue roan that was smarter than most men, an' lit out into the wild country, the light of battle a-shinin' in his eyes. Pretty soon he heard a deep rumblin' noise that seemed to come from a little coulee off to his left. Old Blue pricked up her ears an' headed straight for it. The rumblin' kept a-gettin' louder, an' presently Big Jim an' Blue came onto the cause of it. It was Pecos Bill, fast asleep on the coulee bank, a-snorin' for all he was worth. The ground was shakin' with the sound of it, an' Big Jim thought he'd never seen so much man all in one piece as he saw a-lyin' on that arroyo bank.

But he was nothin' daunted. "Git up, Pecos Bill!" he shouted. "Git up, an' let's see if you're a better man than I am!"

Pecos Bill rose up an' stretched, his mighty muscles ripplin' underneath the hide. "Who might you be, young feller?" he inquired, kickin' aside a boulder with the toe of his boot.

"I might be Daniel Boone, but I aint," said Jim. "I'm Big Jim Turner, from the Lazy K Bar, an' I aim to prove that I'm a better man than you are." With that, he 'lighted down from his mare.

Well sir, Pecos Bill began to get mad, right then and there. He let a roar out of him like the bellow of a big bay steer, an' made his brag, like the song says:

*I'm a howler from the prairies of the West,
If you want to die with terror, look at me.*

I'm chain-lightnin'—if I aint, may I be blessed!

I'm the snorter of the boundless prairie.

"Well," said Big Jim, "I been around some myself:

*"I been bit by wild tarantulas,
An' the timber wolf I've dared.
The grizzly grim, I've battled him,
In his native wildwood lair."*

Whereupon the both of them went for their guns so fast you couldn't see their hands move. But neither of them was any faster than the other, so they stood there holdin' their guns, each knowin' that he couldn't pull trigger fast enough to beat the other fellow.

Finally Big Jim smiled. "Well," he said, "I come from the Wind River country where the men all grow eighteen hands high, an' where every baby puncher cut his teeth on a six-gun handle, but I never seen a faster draw than that. Looks like we'll have to find us some other form of amusement." So he threw his gun aside; Pecos Bill did likewise.

"I've heard you lay some claim to bein' a cowpuncher, Big Jim," said Pecos Bill. "I know where there's a wild herd of longhorns. If you think you're man enough to hog-tie cattle 'longside of me, why, come on. Wait till I call my mount." He gave a whistle so loud that it woke all the Mexicans on the Rio Grande from their siestas, an' presently his grizzly bear came a-lopin' out of the timber. Pecos Bill looked sideways at Big Jim, but Jim never turned a hair, an' the blue roan mare just cocked one ear up, sassy-like.

So Pecos Bill climbed on his grizzly an' went tearin' across country, goin' through brush patches like a steam roller. But Big Jim an' his mare were right behind him every jump. Presently they came onto a smooth green valley and a herd of the wickedest-lookin' longhorns you ever saw.

"Well, here's my little pets," said Pecos Bill. "Tie into 'em!" An' he went ridin' into the middle of the herd, bull-doggin' those big rawboned steers right an' left, from off his grizzly's back. He handled them like they were spring calves, hog-tiein' them with the long cane grass that grew in the valley. Big Jim wasn't far behind, his rawhide riata a-flyin' through the air like a blacksnake, an' his blue roan mare holdin' back tight on the rope, so Jim could run up an' hog-tie a steer after he'd been roped an' thrown.

There was such a bellowin' of cattle as never was heard before or since in all that Texas country. Every time Pecos Bill would hog-tie a steer, he'd

call out his total: an' every time Big Jim got a longhorn down, he'd do the same. Finally, "Five hundred an' ninety-five!" called out Pecos Bill.

"Five hundred an' ninety-five!" Jim shouted back. They both looked around, an' there the whole herd was, lyin' hog-tied in that valley—all except one, that is. He was a big rawboned critter, an' he was high-tailin' it for a coulee like a scared coyote. Both Big Jim an' Pecos Bill jumped for their mounts an' started after him, neck an' neck. They caught up to him, goin' hell-fer-leather, just as he slid down over the coulee bank.

Pecos Bill's grizzly started slidin' down the bank too, but the blue roan mare stopped short, an' Big Jim Turner shot out of the saddle, to land right between that steer's horns, at the bottom of the coulee. Well, by the time Pecos Bill arrived, Jim had the steer bull-dogged an' hog-tied.

Pecos Bill saw he was beaten, all right, an' he let a bellow out of him like a mosshorn pawin' the ground. He dismounted an' came chargin' at Big Jim, his big fists a-swingin' through the air. Jim knew that if he ever let Pecos Bill get a hold on him, he'd be mashed like a prairie dog in a rattlesnake's coils. So he kept a-dancin' in an' out, hittin' Pecos Bill just enough to make him mad.

Well sir, for the better part of two hours those two giants battled in the afternoon sun, an' every blow they landed was enough to kill an ordinary man. Bill finally began to see that his blind rushes weren't gettin' him anywhere, so he reached down right quick, picked up a boulder the size of a man's head, an' let fly at Big Jim. Jim was quick enough to duck it, though, an' it buried itself three feet in the coulee bank back of him.

Then Big Jim really began to see red, an' let loose a blow like was never seen before. He pulled it from his boot-tops, an' Pecos Bill could no more dodge it than a statue, because he was off-balance from throwin' the rock. Jim's fist thudded on his jaw like a mule's kick, an' Pecos Bill dropped like a fallin' tree.

WHEN he came to, Jim was a-standin' over him. "Well," said Jim, "you've met Big Jim Turner from the Wind River country where the men all grow eighteen hands high. An' you'd better light out of this country in a hurry, 'cause I'm a fightin' fool, an' if you're not careful, I might really git mad an' hurt you." Pecos Bill said never a word, but rose up an' called his mount. The last anybody ever saw of him in that Texas country, he was headin' due west.

An' that, folks, is how Big Jim came a-ridin' down the trail an' acquired his first herd of longhorn steers.

Big Jim versus Paul Bunyan

NOW, it happened that Big Jim Turner found himself with a herd of wild steers on his hands down in the Texas country. An' these were not ordinary steers. There was no time of the day or night that they couldn't be found a-pawin' an' a-snortin' an' lookin' for a fight. There were a lot of mountain-lions in that Pecos River country, an' Big Jim, bein' a good cowman, used to try an' hunt 'em down. Then one day when he was a-trailin' one, he came out on a little flat, an' there were two of his outlaw steers a-tossin' the lion back an' forth on their horns. So Big Jim rode up an' knocked their heads together just to remind 'em not to play so rough next time, an' he didn't worry no more about mountain-lions.

But presently Jim's cattle got to be so ornery they took to gorin' the tame cows on the ranches thereabouts. One day Jim was a-lyin' in front of his tent, enjoyin' the sun, when a whole posse of cowmen came a-ridin' up.

"Big Jim," said one of 'em, "those critters of yours are doin' more damage to our herds than all the rustlers on the Rio Grande. We came to tell you to trail 'em out of here."

With that, Jim rose up, a-rarin' an' full of fight. "I'm Big Jim Turner from the Wind River country, where the men all grow eighteen hands high," said he, "an' no man livin' can face me down. I cut my teeth on a six-gun handle, an' I can turn a grizzly bear wrong-side-out by reachin' down his throat an' grabbin' a-holt of his tail. But I'm a good cowman, an' I'll see no harm come to your herds. Besides which, I got the itchin' foot, so I'll jest trail my critters north."

"But you haven't got no punchers, Big Jim," said the cowmen. "An' how you goin' to trail your critters north when you haven't got no punchers?"

"Watch me," said Big Jim, an' gave a whistle. Presently his blue roan mare, that was smarter than most men an' could turn on a dime, came a-lopin' into sight, an' stood for him to saddle her with his silver-mounted saddle. Then they all rode down through the mesquite brush to where Jim's outlaw steers were a-grazin' in a big swale. When the critters saw the cowmen, they started pawin' the ground, because they had never let any man handle 'em but Big Jim Turner.

So Big Jim motioned to the cowmen to stay back while he rode down into the valley. He rode right up to where the leader of the herd stood a-snortin', an' there he stopped. Then he began to sing a song. It wasn't a

loud song, an' it wasn't a soft song, but it was a kind of an in-between song. It told about Big Jim's home range up North on the Lazy K Bar—about little calves rompin' in knee-deep prairie grass, while a summer breeze sighed through the jack-pines on the ridges. It told about a great green valley where steers could eat their fill, an' could drink from a crystal-clear spring. There weren't any brandin'-irons, the song said, nor any wolves, nor any mountain-lions. Big Jim began to sway a little in the saddle as he sang an' presently the old outlaw mosshorn leader's eyes half-closed, an' he began to sway a little, too. Before long the whole herd lined up in trail formation, an' when Big Jim turned the nose of his blue roan mare north, the outlaw steers followed right behind, a-listenin' to his chant. So that's how Big Jim started his herd north without any cowpunchers.

Well sir, Jim rode along on his blue roan mare, that could make a hundred miles a day an' never turn a hair, an' the old mosshorn followed behind, leadin' the rest of the herd. They got along fine until they came to the banks of the Little Muddy River. The Little Muddy was bank-high, an' a-roarin' like a forest in a hurricane. Big Jim took one look at it, threw a loop over the horns of the old leader steer, an' dallied to his saddle-horn.

"Scared of 'er, Blue?" he said. But his blue roan mare just snorted an' struck out for the far bank, a-towin' the mosshorn leader. An' each one of those outlaw steers grabbed the tail of the one ahead, in his mouth. Well sir, inside of fifteen minutes the whole herd was on the north bank of the Little Muddy, an' was stringin' out on the trail again. The sun was a-shinin', an' the meadow-larks were all a-makin' music from the sagebrush tops. Big Jim's silver-trimmed chaps were a-flappin' in the breeze, an' he was plumb happy, so he began singin' the song that punchers have sung ever since while drivin' up from Texas:

Here we go a-rollin' up the Chisholm Trail,

Two thousand steers a-bellerin', an' followin' nose to tail.

We don't know where we're goin', but we're sure a-makin' time,

An' we're goin' to git to Kansas, if we never make a dime.

Roll along, roll along,

Roll along, little dogies, roll along.

For we're goin' to git to Kansas, if we never make a dime.

An' that's how Big Jim Turner brought the first herd of longhorn steers out of Texas. He sold his herd to a buyer out of Abilene, an' hung around a spell. Then he began to get the itchin' foot again. "'Cause," he said, "I'm Big Jim Turner from the Lazy K Bar; an' I want to git back to the Wind River country where the men all grow eighteen hands high, an' every baby puncher cuts his teeth on a six-gun handle." So he climbed aboard his blue roan mare an' started driftin'.

Everywhere he went, people came to wonder at the color of his mare, but mostly they let him alone, because they'd heard how he was born with a gun in each hand. But one day he came a-swingin' into the town of Elkhorn, an' never a soul did he see on the main street. He rode along, wonderin' where all the people could be, an' presently he saw an old man a-scuttlin' across the road like a cottontail huntin' for cover. "Where's the fire?" asked Big Jim. "An' where's all the citizens o' this here village?"

"Stranger, aint you heard?" said the old man. "Windy Bill's in town, an' he's on the prod. You better git out o' sight afore you begin to look like a sieve."

"An' whereat might I find this playful gent named Windy Bill?" inquired Jim.

DOWN at the Ace-high Saloon, a-drinkin' red likker," replied the old man, duckin' into a doorway.

"Well," said Big Jim to himself, "I haven't done no shootin' for, so long my gun is like to rust. Come on, Blue!" An' he rode up to the Ace-high Saloon, a-loosenin' his gun-belt. He came bustin' through the double doors, an' there was Windy Bill, a-poundin' on the bar an' drinkin' red likker. Everybody in the place was sittin' around the walls, afraid to move. As Jim stepped inside, Windy Bill was started makin' his brag.

"I'm wild an' woolly, an' full o' fleas," he roared. "I never been carried above the knees. I'm the original six-toed bad-man, an' it's my night to howl. If any one o' you is man enough to drink with me, step up an' name your poison."

Nobody sittin' around the walls stirred, but Big Jim Turner came a-stridin' up to the bar. "I'll drink with you, Windy Bill," said he, "an' you name it."

"Stranger," said Windy Bill, "maybe you aint heard o' the little custom I have o' shootin', whosomever I drink with. You don't look like a gunman

to me, an' there's no more room for notches on my gun."

Then Big Jim began to get mad, an' he rose up until he stood full eighteen hands high. The blue fire flashed in his eyes. "I may not be a gunman," he said, "but I'll do till one comes along. Set us out a quart apiece o' red likker, bartender, an' don't bother about glasses."

Windy Bill hoisted his bottle an' gulped, but Big Jim took his in two long snorts. "Now, then," said he, "you can sling your shootin'-iron any time you've got a mind to."

With that, Windy Bill's hand went to his holster like a hawk swoopin' down on a sage-hen, but he was no match for Big Jim Turner. "'Cause," Big Jim said when the smoke had cleared away an' they were carryin' Windy Bill out, "I'm a ridin' Gila monster from the Wind River country, an' I was born with a six-gun in each hand."

So that's how Windy Bill died with his boots on, just like the song says:

*Oh, a gunman bad was Windy Bill,
'Twas likker got him down.
An' they made him a grave out on Boot
Hill*

When Big Jim came to town.

Well sir, the people of Elkhorn just fair worshiped Big Jim after that, because this Windy Bill feller had been a-lettin' holes through some of the town's most upstandin' citizens pretty promiscuous-like. All the pretty gals made eyes at him when he came a-walkin' down the street, an' several cowmen thereabouts offered him partnerships in their ranches. But Jim turned 'em all down. "I wasn't never born to die with my boots on," he said, "an' I'm never goin' to settle down. 'Cause:"

*"I'm bound to follow the longhorn steer,
Wherever he may roam.
My only roof is the blue sky clear,
The plains my only home."*

So after two-three days Big Jim rose up one mornin' at the crack o' dawn, cocked his ten-gallon hat on one side o' his head, an' hit the trail on his blue roan mare that could make a hundred miles a day an' never turn a hair.

Before long they came to a fork in the trail; one fork led out into the flat open plains, an' the other went a-twistin' off up toward the timber country, where the snow glistened on the high peaks.

"Well, we got nothin' to do, an' all the time in the world to do it in, Blue," said Big Jim. "Which trail do we take?"

Now the wind from the prairie was a-carryin' the smel of sagebrush an' cattle, that the blue roan mare was used to; but the wind from the high

country carried a new smell—the smell of sawdust fresh cut from spruce an' sugar-pine logs. It was kind of an interestin' smell, so the mare turned up the trail that led to the timber country. Before travelin' far, they came to a log-road, with big pine trees on each side of it.

Presently Big Jim an' his mare heard the sound of axes a-ringin' in the timber, an' before they knew it they came out in a little clearin', where a sawmill was a-puffin' an' a-wheezin'. But the sawyer was sittin' in the shade, an' his helpers were standin' around, leanin' on their cant-hooks.

"Who owns this layout?" asked Big Jim, ridin' up to the sawyer.

"Miss Billie Barlow owns it," the sawyer answered, "an' you'll find her over in the office shanty, cryin' her eyes out because she's goin' to lose the mill her daddy left her when he died."

So Big Jim rode over to the office shanty, an' there was Miss Billie Barlow, with her eyes all red from cryin'. "What's the trouble?" asked Jim.

"We've got to have fifty carloads of lumber ready to go out by tomorrow night, or else I lose the mill," she answered. "An' my timber-men are so slow they can't even keep the sawyer busy."

"Well, we'll get the lumber out, then," said Big Jim, takin' off his chaps an' spurs.

"There's nobody on earth could do it outside of maybe Paul Bunyan," said Miss Billie. "Besides, you're a cowpuncher. What do you know about swingin' an ax?"

BIG JIM stood up straight, an' his eyes flashed fire. "I don't know who this Paul Bunyan feller is," said he, "but I'm Big Jim Turner from the Lazy K Bar, an' there aint no better man than I am, from the Powder River to the Rio Grande. I may not be a timber-man, but I can sure learn. I never rode a mountain-lion either, but I could do it, 'cause I can ride anything that's got four legs an' wears hair."

"So go git me ten men with grindstones, Miss Billie Barlow, for I'm goin' to need 'em to keep my axes sharp. Call in all your timber-men, an' give each one a team o' horses to skid out my logs with. Give the sawyer an ex-try helper, too, 'cause you're goin' to see timber fall like it never fell before."

Then Miss Billie Barlow called in all her timber-men, an' gave each one a skid team to snake out Big Jim's logs. When he went into the timber, ten men were a-followin' right behind with grindstones. The first stroke Jim made, he buried an ax-head clear out of sight in the trunk of a big spruce

tree, so they brought him two special double-bitted axes that were too heavy for the rest of the lumberjacks.

Before long, the timber was a-crashin' down so fast you'd have thought there was an earthquake, an' the more Big Jim learned about swingin' an ax, the faster it fell. The skidders started bringin' in so many logs to the mill that the sawyer had to have a man to pour water on the saw, so's it wouldn't get red-hot an' burn the lumber. Before evenin', ten carloads of lumber were stacked up in the racks, an' Miss Billie Barlow began to smile a little.

When night came on, Big Jim stopped an' leaned on his ax. "Go get your lanterns from the bunkhouse, boys," said he, "'cause we're goin' to work all night." So the men brought their lanterns, an' all night long Big Jim felled timber for 'em to skid out to the mill. When the contractor showed up the next afternoon, there were his fifty carloads of lumber, all stacked an' ready to go.

As Big Jim came a-stridin' out of the timber with his two axes on his shoulder, all the men gathered round an' marveled at him. "He must be some kin to Paul Bunyan," one of the lumberjacks said, an' Big Jim heard him.

"Just who might this Bunyan feller be?" he inquired, an' when they had sat down at the cook-house table they told him all about Paul Bunyan an' his great ox, Babe.

They told him that Paul was the bull of the North Woods lumbermen, an' a holy terror. They told him how Paul was the only man livin' who could lift himself by his own bootstraps, an' how he could carry a load so heavy that he sank knee-deep in solid rock at every step. The men said that the great ox Babe had once been hooked to the tail of a blizzard, an' had outpulled it. One of the lumberjacks said he had once been in Paul's loggin'-camp, an' had seen the great flapjack skillet that was so large it had to be greased by two men tyn' slabs of bacon to their feet an' skatin' around inside it.

"Well," said Big Jim, finishin' off a hindquarter of barbecue beef, "there's no man in the timber country or anywhere else that can say he's a better man than I am. Now that I've learned how to swing an ax, I aim to start off in the mornin' to find this here Paul Bunyan's loggin'-camp."

When Big Jim rose up next mornin' an' got ready for to pull his freight, there was Miss Billie Barlow a-waitin' for him. "Big Jim Turner," said she, "I don't know how to thank you enough for savin' my mill, but I don't take it kindly that you're leavin'. I like you, Big Jim, an' if you'll stay on, I'll make you boss of all my lumberjacks."

But the blue roan mare was a-stampin' an' a-snotin' because she had caught sight of a trail leadin' through the timber, an' Big Jim himself was a-honin' to be on the move. So he said: "I sure appreciate your offer, Miss Billie Barlow, an' maybe I'll ride through here again some day; but right now I've got to go find out if Paul Bunyan's a better man than I am." With that, he swung his leg across the saddle an' left her standin' there a-wavin' good-bay to him.

IT was pretty rough goin' as Big Jim an' his mare traveled up through the timber country. The crags seemed to frown down on 'em, an' some of the high passes were full of snow. There was lots of down timber in the trails, an' once they got rimrocked amongst the box cañons. Finally, though, when they hadn't seen a soul for three days, they came to the country of the big spruce trees, an' ran across a timber scout.

"I'm lookin' for Paul Bunyan, bad," said Big Jim. "Can you tell me where his loggin'-camp is?"

"Well," answered the timber scout, "do you see that big bare valley yonder? Yesterday that valley was full o' spruce, but Paul an' his crew cleaned it out this mornin'. You'll find his camp on the far side o' that ridge."

When Big Jim rode across the ridge, there was Paul Bunyan's loggin'-camp, set by the side of a river. The lumberjacks were takin' a half-holiday, an' some of them were a-birlin' logs out in the middle of the stream. The cook-shack of the camp was as big as the hay-barn on an ordinary cow ranch, an' most of the men were sittin' around in front of it when Jim rode up. They were a-watchin' Paul Bunyan, who was entertainin' 'em by jugglin' a couple of boulders the size of a horse's head as easy as you or I would juggle marbles.

The men all gathered around as Big Jim came up, lookin' him over, because they'd never seen a cowpuncher in those parts before. Paul Bunyan stopped jugglin' the rocks an' said: "Howdy, stranger. Get down an' rest, an' tell us your troubles."

"I'm Big Jim Turner, from the Lazy K Bar," Jim said, "an' I can out-ride, out-robe, an' out-shoot any puncher from the Powder River to the Rio Grande. But I heard tell that you was a better man than I am, so I came to find out."

"Fair enough," said Paul Bunyan, throwin' the boulders he was holdin' plumb out of sight. "Come on down to the river an' I'll birl logs with you."

"I don't remember," Big Jim said, takin' off his chaps, "that I ever birlled a log in my life, but I can sure try."

So Big Jim followed Paul Bunyan down to the river bank, an' when

Paul jumped onto one end of a big floatin' log, he saw that he was expected to jump onto the other end. Presently Paul's great calked boots started to whirl the log in the water, an' Jim had to jump like he was skippin' rope to stay on top of his end. Inside of a minute the log was whirlin' like a buzz-saw, an' when Paul stopped it sudden-like, Big Jim's high-heeled cowpuncher boots slipped—an' he splashed near all the water out of the river when he fell.

"Well," said he, climbin' out on the bank, "you piled me off the log, all right. But then, you can't ride my blue roan mare without gettin' piled, either."

"You tried birlin' with me," said Paul Bunyan; "so I'll try ridin' with you." An' he walked up to the roan mare. Big Jim whispered in the mare's ear, an' when Paul climbed aboard she gave one big crow-hop. Paul landed in a scrub-pine bush, an' the lumberjacks laughed just as hard at him as they had at Jim's wettin' in the river.

Then Big Jim swung into the saddle an' tickled the mare's flanks, an' she began buckin' like the worst outlaw on the range. But Big Jim rode her straight up an' rolled a cigarette in the air. Never once was there daylight showin' between him an' the saddle.

"We've done nothin'," said Paul when Big Jim was climbin' down from Blue, "exceptin' to show that you can't birl logs an' that I'm no buckaroo. Can you swing an ax?"

"Sure," answered Jim, "if you got one big enough for me."

Paul Bunyan brought out two of his special axes that it took three men to lift, an' handed one to Big Jim. "We'll swamp out a log-road down the valley," said he, "an' we'll cut timber for an hour. My crew'll count the logs as we down 'em."

The two started cuttin' their way through the timber, an' the big trees fell like wheat before a scythe. Never before in all the North Woods country was there such a crashin' of timber. For miles around the lumberjacks all ran for the high bare ridges, because they figured a twister was a-comin', sure. The chips flew out from under the axes of Paul Bunyan an' Big Jim like snowflakes in a blizzard. But no sooner would Paul notch a tree an' fell it than Big Jim would do the same, an' when the time was up, they'd swamped a log-road five miles down the valley. When the foreman of Paul's crew came a-stridin' up, he told 'em they'd felled exactly the same amount of timber.

"Looks like we'll have to fight it out hand-to-hand," said Big Jim. He said it kind of sad-like 'too,' because he'd taken a likin' to Paul Bunyan, an'

Paul wasn't no-wise hostile toward him.

"I got a better idea," Paul Bunyan said. "I've heard you set some store by your blue roan mare, Big Jim. Now, I've got a great ox, Babe, that I think quite a lot of. Supposin' we were to hook 'em up to pull against one another, an' decide it that way. If'n my Babe outpulls your Blue, then you'll admit that I'm a better man than you are. If it turns out the other way, then I'll admit that you're the better man."

"Bring out your ox," said Big Jim, an' they all walked back to the loggin'-camp. Paul yoked up his great ox, an' Jim 'lowed he'd never seen so much ox all at one time. Then the lumberjacks brought out the largest log-chain in camp. Its links were so big that a small dog could jump through one without ever touchin'.

Big Jim climbed into the saddle on his blue roan mare, an' hooked one end of the chain around the saddle-horn while Paul Bunyan was a-hookin' the great ox to the other end. Then Blue began a-scratchin' gravel, an' the ox Babe pulled so hard he sank his hoofs plumb out of sight in the ground. But neither one was makin' any headway, so Big Jim gave Blue the spurs, an' Paul goaded his ox. The both of 'em gave a big heave, an' the chain snapped right in two.

"I reckon that settles it," said Big Jim Turner, 'lightin' down an' takin' off his vest for to fight.

HOLD on a minute," said Paul Bunyan. "I'm not afraid o' you or any man livin'; I'll fight you if you say so, Big Jim. But I kind o' like you, an' it won't do us a bit o' good to tangle, 'cause you're a puncher, Jim, an' I'm a lumberman. Cowmen are goin' to tell stories about you for years to come, an' lumberjacks'll do the same about me. No matter if I was to lick you, you'd still be the best cowpuncher from the Powder River to the Rio Grande. An' if you was to lick me, I'd still be the boss bull o' the lumberjacks. If'n you want to go back to the Wind River country peaceable, here's my hand—an' I'll admit that you're the best man I ever met."

Big Jim stood there a-frownin'; but presently he began to grin, an' he reached out an' shook Paul Bunyan's hand in a grip that would have crushed an ordinary man's bones. Then the two of 'em an' all the lumberjacks went up to the cook-house, where the cook was a-makin' flapjack batter in a cement-mixer, an' they all sat down to eat. . . .

So that, folks, is how Big Jim Turner of the Lazy K Bar met Paul Bunyan of the North Woods—an' how they decided that neither was a better man than the other!

They liked to win; they were professionals, and plenty tough. But both the lady and the gambler who was after her discovered they had a code of their own.



SALLY CRAIG clenched her fists and leaned forward in the sideline box and said audibly, "I won't have it! They can't do that! I'll fire every one of them!"

She was exceptionally lovely, from the slim ankles in nylons to the sleek auburn head in a toque. She did not even wear funny hats. Charley Forsythe said, "Well, you cannot do much about these Behemoths. They are a rugged crowd. Professional football has its traditions, too. The Behemoths are always a little rougher than the other guys. And last year when they played the Terriers this Knocker Simon sort of gave it to one of ours. He broke the man's leg. So this year—well, what can you expect?"

Sally said ominously: "I can sell them. A certain party wants to buy the club—a big syndicate."

Charley said: "You mean Monk Farrango? He is not a syndicate. He is a gambler. He operates as a stockbroker and he plays big shot, and goes to the Thousand Club and buys champagne. But he is a crooked gambler. I know it."

It was difficult to oppose her. Charley shifted, shrugging himself into position to watch the field. It was the beginning of the second half and the score was fourteen to six for the Behemoths, and the boys knew what to do. Still, he felt he should be on the bench. He had coached them for three seasons now, but he could never rid himself of the feeling of responsibility, not for a second, when they were on the field. He was a tight, slight man and inside him somewhere was a football full of brains.

RUGGED

Sally Craig said: "I wish I had never inherited them! I wish my uncle had been a butcher or grocer or something! They are a bunch of dirty brutes!"

Charley said: "Well, they have given the Terriers somewhat of a going-over, I admit. But it is in the manner of a lesson. I mean, this Knocker broke Lemon's leg, and Obie Buller was Lemon's roomie, see? Lemon can't play this season on account of that gam—leg, I mean."

"There is no excuse for brutality," she said. "And besides, it has cost us a touchdown in penalties! One hundred yards in one half!"

Charley peeked at her out of the corner of one eye. She had a notebook and a pencil in her lap. Sometimes he wondered about this girl who had inherited the Behemoths from Bill Button. She was from over in Jersey, and seemed a sort of suburban, country-club, young Helen Hokinson character. She had morals and ideals and believed in good clean sport, life and everything. But she could add up yards lost in penalties, too. . . .

The Behemoths kicked off. Knocker Simon, grimly taking his beating, started to block for Reb Ogilvy, the Terrier backfield flash. The Terriers had a good club; they were the team to beat for the championship of the

East. They had got some good ones in the draft, and they had all the old experienced heads, and they were smooth as silk. The Behemoths had slugged out their eight-point lead, but it had been dingdong all the way, and now the Terriers were coming.

He forgot the girl, watching Simon come up over the thirty-five, aiming for Obie Buller's stocky, stalwart form. He gritted his teeth, groaning. This was the first time they had come together in an open field. Obie may have taken a couple of glancing hacks at Knocker in scrimmages, but Charley knew Obie was far from satisfied.

Reb started to cut back, with Resnick and Applebaum trying to clear a lane for him. He hit the thirty-four. Jig Rosselli cut to attempt the tackle. Obie had only to put Knocker out of Jig's way. There was a loud crash.

Sally cried: "Oh! Look! That finishes it!"

Charley said, "Miss Craig, I am afraid you are correct," and began running for the field.

The whole stadium was on its feet. The officials were waving arms like frantic traffic-cops. Whistles blew; horns sounded. But Knocker Simon did not hear any of it.

The temptation had been too great for Obie. When the two came together, he merely hauled off. He was



by Joel
Reeve

ILLUSTRATED

by ROY
BESSER

CROWD

one of those close-built, long-armed guards, the best in the business. His rocky fist slammed hard against Knock-er's nose. It was the first time Charley had ever seen a man knocked completely cold by a punch on the beak.

THEY were banishing Obie. He was coming off, gay and happy as a bug. Charley met him at the sideline. He said sternly: "That'll cost you fifty bucks."

"It's worth it," said Obie, grinning widely. "I bet I busted it all to hell for him."

Charley said: "And it costs the team half the distance to the goal-line. I sure hope you're satisfied, you dumb clunk!"

They were carrying Knock-er off and pacing the distance to penalize the Behemoths. Arms still semaphored as the Terriers made threats of reprisal which they never meant to fulfill, for gang fights would do nothing for the game; and the pros, even in heat, think always of the gate—excepting only the Behemoths. Obie's face fell down on his chest—not such a fall, at that, as Obie had practically no neck. He said: "Jeez, I did not think of that, Charley. Jeez, I am sorry—honest I am, Charley!"

Dixon went in for Buller. The Terriers deployed. A slim lad, num-

bered 18, subbed for Knock-er. There was a quick reverse; the hole opened; this Number 18 skipped into it. Pete Porter, Behemoth center, yelled for help. Two Terriers downed him on the right side; another laid out Louie Paskow; one went down to screen Spanish Danny Rey, the Behemoth safety.

Number 18 proved a flashy lad. He skidded over the goal a step ahead of Arthur Boone, quarterback and blocker for the home club. The scoreboard changed to "BEHEMOTHS 14," and a moment later, "TERRIERS, 13."

Charley wheeled on Obie. The burly little guard was sitting on the bench. There were real tears in his eyes. He said: "I'd of broken my own leg if I would 'a' stopped to think."

Charley remembered Lemon, and how Obie had always tagged around after him and sort of looked out for the big, lanky star tackle. He remembered Lemon's leg, the way it had bent, all awkward, after Knock-er had clipped him thoughtlessly and unnecessarily in the final game of last season. They had removed Knock-er from the game at once, sensing what might happen. The Behemoths had gone on to win, but Lemon's leg still was not right, and Obie had bought pencillin, and was right now trying to get him back in shape.

Charley said: "That's what happens when you get tough. Let it be a lesson to you."

Obie said: "Honest, Charley, I'll never do it again. I'll get him in a scrimmage where it won't show, next time, honest!"

Charley gloomily watched the Terriers kick off. Danny Rey got only to the twenty-five on the return. The Terriers were on top; now they had a feeling of being injured, and they were reinforced by this Number 18 slicker—his name was Perch and he was from Midwest Teachers' Normal. Charley saw by the program, another gaudy sleeper unheralded and unsung—and some big linesmen who were plenty good. He sent in Syd Cohn for Lunk Magee, who seemed slightly weary in the fullback spot, and told Syd to give orders to turn loose all the Behemoths had in the trick bag.

They did not have a lot. They were a power club. They loved to roister downfield, rampaging over opposition, swaggering, making the others take it. They were huge opportunists, great ball hawks, smarter than a pack of beagles on the hunt. He loved them; that was the truth. He knew them inside and out, and they were rugged, but he loved them.

HE was aware that the new owner was calling him. He looked at her cheeks in the early October sun, at the slim lines of her curving figure, at the lights in her dark eyes. He sighed. He would rather have faced a lioness.

She said at once, "You fired Buller, of course."

"Well—" he said helplessly. "No. I didn't."

She said: "Charley Forsythe, you will either get rid of that little bully, or I will sell this club to Monk Farrango!"

Charley said: "We can talk about it tomorrow, Miss Craig. We got a ball-game on our hands today."

"Tomorrow, next week, next year, my decision stands," she said. "I will not tolerate ruffianism! Buller goes, as an example to the others. I will speak to the team after the game!"

Charley said in panic: "Now, wait! You cannot do that!"

"I own them!" she said imperiously.

"But they are football-players, not slaves," Charley protested. "There is a big investment in the Behemoths. You have stockholders. If you begin messing with my boys, they will not play ball, and then people will not pay to see them run, and then you will be in much trouble, Miss Craig. . . . Oh, no, you must not talk to them."

She said, "They have to kick! If that Perch boy gets loose again—Oh, a bad kick!"

It was hurried by the charging Terrier line, and Danny Rey did not get it off so good. It went out of bounds just past midfield, setting up Terrier strategy. Charley rushed back to the bench. He felt like a commuter between the box and the bench, and he did not like it. In fact, he thought, facing facts, he did not like Miss Sally Craig. Under different circumstances, he might have felt differently, because she was quite a dish. But right now he disliked her tremendously. He snapped at two linesmen, sending them in to stem the Terrier rush.

They stopped it, too. Obie sat beside Charley and mourned: "It is all my fault! I could kill myself!"

Charley said: "Shut up. Go to the showers—you're through!"

Obie said, amazedly: "Leave while the guys are playing? Do you think I am nuts? I got to see how we do, don't I?"

The Terriers threw a pass and got five. Then they tried a spread formation, but they sent this Perch into the center of the line, and somehow they got blocking there too, and the Number 18 was weaving in and out. Louie and Pete and Arthur all got a hand on him, but he spun and whirled and got away. He scored.

SO it was twenty for the Terriers, and that was all, because Pete roared through and blocked the attempt at goal. But the Behemoths only counted fourteen, and the quarter ended, and there were no more stunts in the bag, none at all.

And later, when the final whistle blew, it was still twenty to fourteen and the Behemoths had lost, and the

Terriers went mad, believing now they had the championship of the East in the bag, because they could surely handle every club if they could beat the Behemoths. Charley trudged to the clubhouse, chin on chest. Around him the huge, rugged giants gathered, and no funeral cortège was gloomier; none walked with slower tread. They went into the dressing-room and sat, and they did not even seem to want to remove their sweaty uniforms. Obie Buller muttered over and over: "If I do not knock over Klocker, this Number 18 does not get a chance to show. A rookie! They would never of played him with Klocker around."

Danny Rey said in tragic accents: "We all steenk! The whole field was stunk up weeth us!"

"All my fault," Obie wept.

"They shake this Perch at us, and we fold," Pete Porter wailed. "A greenhorn, yet, and we cannot lay him away. One little pinch-up, and Perch would be smirched. And we miss the loogan!"

The door opened. Miss Sally Craig's voice said firmly: "I agree. You were all very bad indeed! You gave up one hundred and seventy yards in penalties. You let them hurry a kick, and that set up the plays on which Perch scored. . . . You were intent on dishing out punishment to the Terriers—but you couldn't take it!"

They all stared. Charley Forsythe said: "Now, Miss! This is no place for you—"

To his horror, Obie Buller interrupted: "Leave 'er alone, Charley. She's the boss, aint she?"

Pete Porter said abysmally: "She's got a right, aint she?"

Sally Craig put her hands on her hips. She said: "Sorry, aren't you? Moaning low! Ready to weep, you big sissies!"

"We steenk!" Danny Rey said sadly.

She looked at the handsome Spanish halfback, then at the scarred, unhappy faces of the others. She said with energy: "Obie Buller, you started the trouble. What have you to say for yourself?"

Obie stood up, bravely, facing her. "Nuttin'. If you want me to turn in my uniform, Miss Craig, I'll do it an' quit the game."

Charley knew Obie would die if he did any such thing. The others on the squad gasped at the terrible thought. Sally Craig let her gaze linger on each of them in turn. Then she said softly, her dark eyes gleaming soulfully: "I've changed my mind. I want Obie to stay. I want all of you to stick with me. I want you to play your best and win the Eastern championships by defeating the Terriers the next time you meet—then whipping them in the play-off. I believe

you can do it. . . . But, men, I want no more rough stuff!"

Charley muttered: "Oh—oh!"

She gave him a withering glance, then went on: "Hereafter the Behemoths will win by clean-cut strategy and superior football. You are all fine, experienced players." She smiled at them. She was extremely charming when she smiled. "Discarding your brutal tactics, you will win by virtue of your correspondingly better play."

Obie Buller led the cheering. They swarmed around her. In their sweaty, dirty uniforms, they crowded her into a corner, assuring her that she would learn how good they could be. They promised her the championship—they promised her everything. When Charley extricated her, she was flushed and happy.

She said: "They are really a wonderful bunch of boys. Just big, overgrown kids."

CHARLEY got her out of the dressing-room. He said dryly: "Uh-huh! Pete Porter, for instance. He has a fourteen-year-old son who plays for the best high-school team in the city."

She said: "I don't care! They're—cute!"

Charley roared in pain. "Cute? My Behemoths?" Outside the clubhouse, a man sat in a limousine, waiting. The chauffeur wore a uniform, but he had ears which were cauliflowered, and once he had been Jazbo Grogan, a middleweight fighter. The man had a large face, with a long upper lip bisected by a penciled mustache. He was a thin man, but his face was broad and placidly satisfied from good living. Sally went grandly toward the car, saying:

"Mr. Farrango is taking me to dinner. I will see you tomorrow, and we shall speak of stepping up the team strategy. If you had given them more trick plays, they would have scored again today."

Charley watched her get in without acknowledging the flutter of greeting from Farrango's white hand. He stood rooted until the limousine had rolled out of sight. He opened his mouth to curse, then, but the memory of Obie and Pete and the others genuflecting to the eloquence and beauty of the woman owner of the Behemoths struck him dumb. He was thus twice belabored by fate. He suffered. . . .

The second game with the Terriers was coming up on the morrow, Charley Forsythe sat in his one-room apartment and tried to study the graphs of Terrier plays. He stared at the notebook of his own new stratagems. He groaned.

Yet the Behemoths had come through. Playing deft football, without the thundering power of other

days, they had won all their ball games. They had even defeated the Eagles, who in turn had caught the Terriers on an off day and beaten them, making this second game the deciding issue of the Eastern championships. That was the kind of world Charley was living in—miracles were occurring.

SALLY CRAIG, sweeping grandly in and out of conferences, practice sessions, pre-game huddles, had inspired them. Charley had to admit it. Arthur Boone had turned into the cleverest quarterback ball-handler in the league. Spanish Danny was running them crazy with hipper-dipper sorties. Lunk Magee was plunging like a Nagurski. The entire line was playing inspired—and clean—football.

On the other side of the ledger, the Terriers had grown tough as the season went on. Finding their strength in the initial victory over the Behemoths, they swashbuckled and slammed and whammed and became the darlings of the crowds. While Behemoth gates dwindled as the fans grew weary of tricks and languished for the tough old days, the Terriers became the top team of the East for drawing out the bugs on Sunday afternoons.

The Behemoths, picking up opponents after every play with polite apologies, one eye on the owner's box, had gone soft, all right. They were forever currying favor with Sally. Their sentimentalism had taken a new turn in the ashes of defeat by the Terriers, and now their full natures were all for Sally's new deal. It made

Charley Forsythe slightly sick to his stomach to think about it.

Danny Rey and the others had even tried to date the owner. But they rarely succeeded. She seemed quite preoccupied with other matters—particularly Monk Farrango. The broker-gambler could be very agreeable, Charley suspected, and also helpful in money matters. Sally had nothing except her interest in the club. Farrango could advise her about investments of her dividends. Since the gates had fallen off, this would be important to Sally. . . .

Charley wondered why he made excuses for her. She was the biggest

Charley said: "You're quite a guy. You deal out threats to me. Hadn't you better get out of here?"



nuisance a coach ever had to endure. She interfered with his business; she overruled him on the slightest pretext. She harassed him in every possible way, seeming to take pleasure in it. Twice he had tried to get out of his contract, but she had blocked him there too.

Yet he felt that she was sincere, and this quality he admired above all others. The club belonged to her; she had a right to set the course of the team. She could hire another coach next season and continue to do so. Already the Terriers were making eyes at Charley. They would hire him in a minute, he knew, if he were a free agent.

And they would have money to pay him. Because, looking at the material on his desk, using his football brain, he knew one thing was irrevocably true: The Behemoths could not beat the present Terrier outfit.

With Knocker Simon and the incredible Perch operating alternately as threats, and with the rest of the team slugging the daylight out of the opposition, the Terriers, at this moment, were the best team in the country. They would win in the East over the Behemoths, they would beat the Whales for the national title. It was there, on paper, for Charley to read.

THERE was a ring at his bell. He went to the door, opened it. He stood staring at his visitors. Then he said: "What is this?"

Sally Craig went past him swiftly and sank into his one comfortable chair and put her hands on the arms, clasping them tightly. Monk Farrango gingerly stepped over the threshold, glanced around, smiled blandly and said: "You don't do yourself very proud, Charley. I thought big-time coaches lived well."

Charley walked behind his tiny desk and covered the notebook carefully. He said: "What makes, Miss Craig?"

She wet her lips with the tip of a red tongue. She said: "He—he's got me!"

Farrango shrugged. He said: "Now, now, Sally. . . . You can sell out at a profit."

Charley ignored the man.

"He worked you into a corner, Miss Craig?"

She nodded. "I borrowed on the Behemoth stock—from him. The—investment—did not turn out well."

Charley said: "Imagine! I suppose you were betting on the Terriers to beat the Eagles?"

She nodded dumbly.

Farrango said: "I dropped plenty on that."

"I'll bet you did," said Charley.

Farrango said: "She wanted the money. I let her have it. It is all legal and binding. Then the gates

fell off, and she couldn't pay me. So I shall have to take the Behemoth stock."

Charley said: "That is what you've been angling for."

"You must help!" Sally cried. "I see it all now. Monk tricked me. He pretended to help, and then he double-crossed me."

"Sounds like a bad picture," said Charley. He swung one leg over the edge of the desk. "What's the story, Monk?"

"The corporation has to take over," said Farrango. "It's no skin off your elbow, Charley. They'll want you to stay on."

Charley said: "First it was you; now it's a corporation. How much money do you need, Sally?"

"Ten—ten thousand," she stammered. He had never seen her storm of her confidence. She was no longer stiff, assured. She was soft and weepy and feminine.

Charley said: "Syndicate betting. . . I know—taking the suckers on the football pools. Do you think the league would let you own the Behemoths, Monk?"

"Maybe they would not like it," said Monk, smiling beneath his faint mustache. "But I'm not an officer of the corporation, so what can they do?"

Charley said: "When must this money be up?"

"Monday," said Monk cautiously. "With interest." He kept his round face blank, but there was uneasiness in him, Charley sensed.

Sally wailed: "I've been a fool, Charley!"

"You sure have," Charley said. "I haven't got ten grand, Monk. But I'll have it—on Monday."

Monk said: "I'll believe that when I see it. I came up here to warn you, Charley. No tricks—and no rough stuff. Don't send any of your football players to see me. I have men to handle muscle-bound athletes—two for every one you've got!"

Charley said: "You're quite a guy, Monk. You admit tricking a woman—or practically admit it. You try to move in on the Behemoths. Then you deal out threats to me. Hadn't you better get to hell and gone out of here?"

Monk said: "Just remember what I say."

He was slow picking up his hat. Charley came off the desk, restraining himself very carefully, going across the floor. Monk's confidence carried him to the door. He opened it. He smirked at Charley, winking and jerking his head toward Sally. He said: "She's quite a twist, but not my style. Too chilly—"

That was when Charley swung his leg. He had once been able, despite

his leanness, to punt a football an average of fifty yards. He did not quite manage to get the distance he wanted, but he booted the gambler to the head of the stairs. Wigwagging there for a second, Monk lost his balance and went tumbling. He hit every third step with some part of his anatomy. Charley watched with satisfaction, then made a bluff at following him. Monk dragged himself hastily into the street, and Charley lounged back into his apartment.

Sally said: "He is—a crook!"

"I told you that long ago," said Charley wearily. "I hate people who say things like that, but I've got to point it out to you because there are other things—"

She said: "Charley—couldn't we bet on the Behemoths tomorrow?"

He said: "Betting is what got you into trouble. Besides, it is not ethical to lay huge sums on your club."

She said: "Charley; I can't let it go! . . . I can't let them get control of the Behemoths!"

"You'll still own enough stock to collect an income," he said. "You could live—in Jersey—off the money they pay you. Or you could sell the rest of it to them."

She said: "Charley! You know I wouldn't. . . . You know how I feel about Obie and Danny and Pete and all of them."

He rubbed his chin. He needed a shave, and his hair was mussed and he was weary. He said: "Your lipstick is smudged. . . . Look, I have got maybe five thousand dollars. I can raise the rest, all right. Don't worry about it." He got out his bankbook and looked at it, then threw it to her. He wanted her to believe him, and he did not want to oversell her. He said casually: "You can pay me back next year. I won't be with the club, of course—"

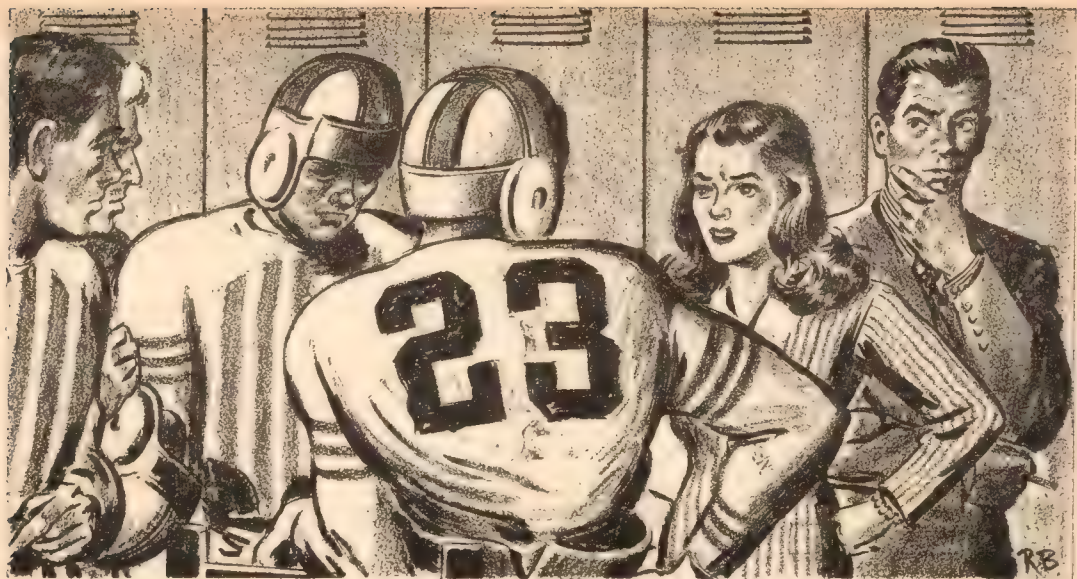
SHE said: "What? You won't be with the Behemoths? Are you insane, Charley?"

"Nope," he said. "I just like my footballers rugged. Maybe I am funny—peculiar, you know. When I played, I was not big enough to be rough, but I always liked 'em that way."

She said: "You—you're not tough. You—you're nice—and loyal—and—Charley, you can't leave me!"

He said: "Fix your lipstick and run along and think it over. When you recover your balance and your ego, you'll know I'm right."

She stood, straight and silent, staring at him. She said tightly: "Oh—let Monk have the Behemoths. Let him—do anything he wants!" She rushed out of the room. She went down the stairs, her high heels clacking on each step.



Sally said: "Sorry, aren't you? Moaning low! You big sissies!"

Charley put the bankbook in the drawer and straightened the papers on the desk. . . . It was then he missed the notebook.

He stared at the spot where it had been, a puzzled look on his face. The Terriers were staying over at the Biltmore. He knew that Monk Farrango was over there right now. The notebook contained every trick play the Behemoths had developed for the big game. Farrango was making sure there should be no last-moment betting coup by the Behemoths to raise the money for payment of Sally's debt.

OBIE BULLER wiped blood from a cut over his eye. He said: "This is a great ball-game. I wouldn't take a million to miss this. That Knocker gave me a belt you could feel it over in Canarsie."

Buller was taking a rest. It was the fourth quarter, and the sign on the scoreboard said "BEHEMOTHS 28, TERRIERS 34." Perch was taking a rest too, on the Terrier bench. In the owner's box, Sally was gnawing a pair of gloves as though she hated them. Charley said: "It is about time to begin taking them apart."

On the field, Perch started from the single wing and tried to sweep left end. The Terriers had the ball about midfield and seemed fresh and rough as ever. Perch cut and made his bid. Jig Rosselli banged into a blocker, knocked him for a loop, put a hand on Perch. It was a very large, capable hand, and Perch staggered. Pete Porter bulled through, and threw Perch for a five-yard loss.

Obie said: "They threw the book at us, didn't they? Brother, they have got the book to throw, too."

Charley said: "You've got them softened up."

"Soft as cold steel," scoffed Obie. There was admiration in his square countenance. "They are but very, very good, Charley."

"We need a touchdown," said Charley. He had Arthur Boone, Danny Rey, Louie Paskow and Lunk Magee taking a breather with Obie. "In fact, we have practically got to get a touchdown."

Arthur said: "You call it, Coach."

Charley said: "You remember that play we worked out for a spot? The tricky one?"

Arthur said: "Number eighty-eight?"

"The same," said Charley. "Use it."

"Okay," said Arthur. "I think they are about to kick."

They sat huddled, watching the punt. It was a good one. Daley, the sub quarterback, took it to the twenty-five, and there it rested.

Charley said: "Okay, go and get rugged with them."

They went on the field, treading on their cleats gingerly, mincing their steps in the manner of football-players the nation over. The second string came off. From the Terrier bench came Knocker Simon, Reb Ogilvy and five brawny, rested Terrier linemen.

Obie turned and bestowed an elaborate wink upon Charley, then motioned toward Knocker. That worthy furrowed his brow and put a thumb

against his nose. It was a badly flattened member since that memorable other meeting with Obie.

Charley left the bench and sauntered to the owner's box. Sally was occupying it alone that afternoon. She could have sold the other chairs for a small fortune, but she sat in stark grandeur, furs up to her eyes. She said tragically:

"Charley! We are beaten!"

HE said: "You haven't heard that last whistle yet, have you? Besides, what does it matter? The ten thousand is ready to go to Farrango on Monday."

She said: "You—you raised it? All of it?"

"I said I would," Charley observed flatly.

"I don't care!" she cried. "I want the ball-game! I want my boys to win!"

He said: "Your boys? They've been pretty rough out there today. Cagey, but rugged. You see that eye on Reb? You see Baldy Flint limping? They looked more like my boys than yours today."

"I don't care!" she repeated wildly. "Just so they win. They haven't been penalized—they must have played fair!"

"Sure," said Charley. "But rough. They are no longer your dear little scouts."

"I love them!" she said. "I don't want them to lose."

The Behemoths were on their thirty by virtue of a power play with Lunk carrying! Arthur Boone set them in

a box, and from a balanced line he gave the Terriers Danny Rey, ball and all, looping at right tackle on a delayed thrust, with Obie pulled out and blocking. Someone got in Obie's way and went heels over tin kettle, and then Danny was there, slashing. They hit four Terriers, rode them down. The ball went past midfield with éclat, and the Terriers called for time out.

"Inelegant," said Charley. "But effective."

Sally said timidly: "Did Obie hurt that boy?"

"He just gave him the treatment," said Charley absently. They were taking one of the Terriers off. Knocker Simon was very serious, glaring at Obie. There had been no foul, but it was rough in the clinches now. . . .

Arthur was pretending very well. He was standing up, refusing to rest, laughing at the Terriers. Danny was talking with Obie, as if they had a good story to share. Pete, who must have been weary enough to bed down right where he stood, was deliberately taking a few setting-up exercises, telling the listening world that the Terriers had failed to warm him up.

A WHISTLE blew. Charley forgot Sally Craig, forgot everything. He leaned forward, tense, hands clenched. His topcoat collar framed his lean, tanned face, with wide, intelligent eyes. He had every fiber of his being intent on what might come.

The Behemoths lined up nonchalantly, nudging each other in the line. Obie spat on his hands, tugged up his sleeves, revealing forearms like a blacksmith's, and squatted in position. It was like the beginning of any other power play by the vaunted Behemoths.

Pete bent over the ball, cuddling it in one big palm. Arthur barked meaningless numbers, and they all counted silently. In the midst of Arthur's tirade, Pete slid the ball back and lunged at the guards. Arthur stepped nimbly aside, and Danny Rey shifted into position and took the snap-back.

Arthur ran wide. Lunk ran through and over. Danny skipped, leaped, sunfishing, tossing the ball. It struck into Jig Rosselli's hands. Knocker Simon was close enough to nail Jig then and there.

From nowhere came Obie Buller. His squat frame was like a Sherman tank, bowling along. It bowled into Knocker and the big Terrier back seemed to dissolve before the eyes of the multitude.

Danny was not flash-running. He was following Pete, who had come up fast. Then there was Lunk and Pete; Obie had recovered from his collision with Knocker and was with them

Terriers attacked this formation. They came in charging—big strong men with savvy. They batted Pete aside. They got under Lunk's legs and upended him.

Obie seemed to go crazy. He ran away from Danny, to the right. A Terrier leaped, and two others shot over to intercept the Spanish sprinter. It was then that Arthur arrived, unnoticed. He came right in behind Obie. Danny passed laterally to him.

Arthur kept running, not too fast; for Obie, while swift for a chunky linesman, was not a dasher. Arthur kept watching the Terriers, who had all got down to pay dirt and were waiting. He muttered something to Obie, who shouldered a tackler out of the way and again darted across the field.

The Terriers split, this time, seeing Louie where Obie was headed. They went half for Arthur, and half for Obie and Louie. Knocker Simon had got up and was down at the goal-line, having cut the angle and run like a madman.

So Arthur wheeled at the last possible instant, and apparently threw the ball completely away. There was no one down center except Knocker, waiting to take his shot. The space was vacant.

Sally almost fell out of the box. Charley leaned like the Eiffel Tower. This was the play where coaching counted. This was absolute hair-trigger timing. This either worked, or Charley Forsythe was a tramp who belonged back coaching high school.

Danny Rey seemed to float through the air. He came in, and the vacant spot was suddenly and amazingly filled. At that instant Obie Buller changed direction. He lowered his head, dived from away back and seemed to take wings.

He caught Knocker Simon at the belt-line, right in the open field, where everyone could see, and there was nothing outside the rules in the way he hit. He spread Knocker over several yards of turf, flatter than a Turkish rug.

Danny ran after his prominent Castilian nose. He ran right over the goal-line. He put the ball down, and immediately asked how much time was left. He came back, and Arthur was swinging his leg, ready to kick that point. Danny said something, and Arthur grinned. Charley knew the game was over and only the try for the winning point would be allowed.

Sally said: "He's got to make it! He's got to!"

Charley turned his back on the field. He said: "Have you heard from Farrango?"

"No!" she said. "How can you be so cold, so indifferent? If they don't make it, the score is tied!"

Charley said: "If you want to see your boy friend, he is in the Municipal Hospital. He got pretty badly hurt."

She said: "Arthur's ready. . . . Danny's holding the ball. . . . Oh, they've got to make it!"

Charley said: "Farrango went over and tried to hand our plays to the Terriers. They beat hell out of him. I think they broke several bones."

She said: "It's coming back. . . . Danny's touching it down."

Charley said, "You know where I got all that money from? The other five thousand—and the interest?"

"He made it!" she shrieked, throwing her arms about Charley, falling out of the box, dangling like a lavalier around his neck. "They won! My boys won the championship! They'll beat the Whales—they're the greatest ball-players on earth!"

Charley said mildly: "Arthur never misses. . . . And besides, quite a chunk of his own dough is involved. The boys got together and pitched in the rest of that money. . . . We did not quite have enough, and when Knocker called up to tell us about Farrango and his filthy attempt to give them our plays, Obie borrowed the last five hundred from him. From Knocker!"

She said: "Oh, Charley! Those wonderful, rugged guys!"

He said, "Well, the way they are, they're crazy about you too. But they sort of have to play rough to win. Not dirty, exactly, although when a guy like Knocker gets careless, they have to level off and restore him to reason. But rugged."

"Take me to them!" she cried. "Let's hurry. I've got to be in on the locker-room celebration. I want to hug them all!"

"Uh-huh," said Charley.

THEY were almost to the clubhouse when she stopped, clutching his elbow. She said accusingly: "You don't love me!"

"I do, too!" he said before he had time to consider.

She said, "Well—it's about time you told me so!"

"Okay!" he said. "Okay! But you were so damned stiff and domineering—"

"I had to be," she said. "It was from the first time I saw you. It disturbed me so. . . . I tried to not let you know. It seemed brazen. . . . I got all mixed up, with Farrango and everything, trying to show you—"

He said: "Aw—forget all that. And when we see the boys. . . . Well, that last play was for you. Razzle-dazzle! Fancy!"

She said: "It worked!"

"Uh-huh," said Charley. "With the aid of Providence and two screamin' blocks by Obie!"

I SAW the light in this little shack, and I went up and asked to come in. The worst they can ever do is throw you out, and you get used to that. This was different. A great big fellow comes blinking to the door. He sees me and grins, so I come right in. Is it nice and warm in there! I suppose you're hungry, he says, and I was starving; I had been on the road all day. So he breaks out his own lunch, sandwiches, a container of milk, a piece of peach pie. Ordinarily I do not care much for pie, but I take a little, to be polite.

I sat down opposite him. Neither of us had much to say that night. My stomach was too full, and it was so grand and warm, and I was sleepy. Go to sleep, then, he says. Indeed, I can see you would not be much on this job, he says. Every hour he gets up, and straps a thirty-eight on him, and puts a clock over his shoulder, and starts out around the yard. He does this all night long. When morning comes, he says I think you better get out: now, for there are some who don't like you, or the likes of you—or the likes of me either, he says. But I'll be back again tonight, and you're welcome here, if you can find nothing better, he says.

I keep out of sight as well as I can, all day; and after I see his light, I sneak in, and he sees me and laughs. Back again, I see, he says, and he gives me another fine hand-out. And it is the same every night. He explains to me that Wednesday is his day off; he tells me five or six times, but he need not have worried. I can always get along for a day. Thirst is the greatest trouble, but I can manage.

Thirst was his great trouble too, I think. Friday was his payday. He would always come in smelling of whisky on Friday night, but he never forgot me. The hand-outs were swell on Friday nights. They were good every night.

On Fridays he would say: Well, it's fish we have to eat tonight. Maybe we would have a can of sardines, or salmon, or tuna fish. Once we had sturgeon.

Boyl But we always ate good.

FRIDAYS he'd have a lot to say, although generally he was quiet. Fridays he'd tell me all about the fights he had been in, fights that he always won, too, and about the jobs he had had, and it was not his fault he lost them, except that of course he did drink; not too much, mind you. He told me about his wife that died, and about his three sons, all in the South Pacific, one missing since last March, and about his married daughters, any one of whom would give him a home, and a good home, but no Moran ever took charity, even from their own.

Watchman, What of the Night?

A BRIEF STORY, by
EDWARD L. McKENNA

He had been up, and he had been down, he said, and he would be up again, he said; for indeed, his people came from the North, though they stepped off with the right foot; but to tell the truth, he had people on both sides of the fight at the Boyne Water. And of course he had relatives at Clontarf, with Brian Boru, and at the Yellow Ford, with O'Neill, and with Emmett, and in the Trouble. I began to find that there was no fight in Ireland, ever, without a Moran in it. He would talk to me, and then he would strap on the gat and swing the clock over his shoulder; and on these Friday nights he would go barging out, singing some song about a girl named Lulu. He did not have much of a voice.

Well, one Friday night, he was not so good. He would speak to me, and then he would begin to nod and doze, and wake with a start and rush out. My job depends on it, he says. He would say: Please God, I find sabotoors in this yard, sabotoors, monkeying with my little ships. Please God, he would say. They were always his little ships.

Maybe it was about three o'clock. I think he had missed one ring. I was not asleep; I sleep very lightly. I was getting more and more worried about him. He was snoring.

I had to do it. He was my friend, the best friend I ever had. I nudged him; he slapped at me with his hand. Go away, he said. I nudged him again. This time, he leaped up and cursed, and grabbed the clock and the gat, and went rushing out into the yard. Back he came, white-faced and glaring. This is it. This is it, he said.

Ah, the sabotoors, I said. He is going to get the sabotoors.

It wasn't. It was just a fire, a mean fire, under a section. Nobody knows how long it may have been blazing. There are always fires, in a shipyard.

He went out on the double, trundling a hand truck, with extinguishers and a hose. In ten minutes he was back, his uniform all white from the chemicals in the extinguishers. I can't do it. I can't do it, he said. I'll have to turn in an alarm. *Aagh*, I'll turn in no alarm! I'll do it! Then he blessed himself.

I was nearly crazy. That is the worst thing in the world, to know that your friend is in trouble and you cannot help him.

Maybe he was gone two hours. When he came back, he was a sight. His uniform was ruined, and his hands were cut and bleeding. Give me that report sheet, he said. He wet a pencil. It took him twenty minutes to write this: *Small fire of no consequence, put out by guard Moran, at four-thirty. That will hold them, he said.*

That was Friday. On Sunday night there he was, with his uniform all clean and smelling of Carbona. I heard them outside and just managed to get away. He jumped up and stood to attention. It was the Chief, from the big plant at Bayonne. "At ease, Moran," he said. "An old soldier, eh?" "Yes sir; in the Marines," says Moran. "Hear you had a little fire here Friday night."

"Yes sir."

"I was looking at it. . . . Put that fire out yourself, huh? Your orders are to turn in an alarm, with a fire that size."

"Ah, it was a small fire. It amounted to nothing."

"Yeah. Well, Moran, how would you like to come to Bayonne?"

"Bayonne," Moran said.

"Yes. I need a new sergeant. I had my eye on you, Moran. . . . How you doing with the drink?"

"Well, sir. Well, I, I—"

"Well— You are going to have twenty-four men under you. I depend on you to show them a good example. Report at Bayonne on Tuesday. You can have tomorrow off. Uh—here."

He handed him his stripes.

WHEN he had gone, Moran was like a crazy man. He came running out. Where are you? Where are you, then, he said.

I was right there.

How would you like to go to Bayonne? he said. I'm going to take you with me. It's the fine town, Bayonne. Ah, the fish they have, in Bayonne! And I'll keep you in my place, do you see, because you are my good luck, and we won't be all alone, any more. And we will ring no clocks, for I will be the sergeant, with twenty-four men under me.

I couldn't tell him. To have a home, a good home, with a regular guy! I never had any home. Good luck? I will show him good luck. Him and his people. Mine came from Egypt. . . . I had a great-grandmother who used to ride on a broom. She had some stuff. I bet you I got some stuff! I did not tell him that: he would understand. I just rubbed up against him.

Miaouw, I said.

Mr. Poteet



Fiddling and fishing were his favorite occupations. But when he went on the warpath, it was hard to head him off.

MR. LOCHINVAR POTEET, having breakfasted, arose from the rough-lumber table that graced the main room of his lonesome shack in Lost Lake swamp, and viewed his sad and bony features in the cracked, wavy mirror on the wall under his squirrel-rifle. A wispy lock of sandy hair swung athwart his narrow forehead, giving him a rakishness incompatible with the dignity he had hoped to achieve on this important October day. 'Possum being greasy, he wiped his rough hands on the old weekly newspaper he had used for a napkin, and raked the lock back. Then he bowed from the waist and said:

"Howdy, Miss Flossie. It's a pleasure to set eyes on you this bright fall mornin'. I've brung you some catfish, dressed last night an' fresh as figs in ol' Eden. My fiddle, too. Le's make some music."

Outside, the five rangy pups whose appetites had become a problem were yelping and howling for their breakfast. Fanny, their gaunt blue-ticked mother, was not there; Juke Wittly had borrowed her yesterday.

Above the mist-wreathed mud-bar in the lake east of the cabin, a great blue heron flapped lazy wings and sent up his harsh and rattly call. A high plane roared over the swamp.

Mr. Poteet went closer to the mirror. There was one distressing blemish that hadn't shown up when he had shaved by lamplight last night.

"Gittin' tufty as a dang' rabbit!" he said in disgust. "Reckon I better swinge 'em."

He turned back to the table, ripped off a piece of the newspaper, rolled

it into a rough spill and lighted it in the cookstove. Again at the mirror, he swung the blaze quickly to his right ear, then away. There was a light, crackling sound, and the sharp odor of burned hair arose. He brushed away the charred ends of hair bristling from the now red ear, then applied the blaze to the left ear.

He hoped Miss Flossie wouldn't put at him to pick cotton. She had a big crop, and only the Wittly family to get it out—with Jim Buck Wittly off yonder in the Marines.

But Lochinvar Poteet was a catfisherman, a troliner, a mercurial spirit. Cotton-picking is dull, earth-bound, back-breaking, finger-torturing labor.

Course, it might be smart to pitch in and help somebody, for there was a whopping crop; then Todd Gorman, deputy sheriff and game warden, couldn't go around and say that Lochinvar Poteet was a good-for-nothing floater that ought to be chased out of the swamp. Kernel of the whole matter was that the deputy had his small, slightly crossed eyes on Miss Flossie Judson and her quarter-section of fertile land.

Mr. Poteet scraped together the scant remains of the 'possum. These, with hunks of last night's cornbread, he tossed out the back door to the black-and-tan and blue-ticked pups. Then he turned to the matter of putting on his Sunday clothes.

The figure of a man moved furtively along the foot of the lake bank, stealing from cypress to cypress as he approached Lochinvar's skiff-landing. He was bareheaded; his yellow hair was tousled, and his square young face was dirty with beard. His blue eyes

were bloodshot, and his mouth was set hard. Blood from an ugly thorn-scratch was clotted on the side of his thick neck. He was wet to the knees; his drab clothes were briar-snagged.

The plane was still circling over the swamp, across and up the lake.

The man slumped against a sprangly-boled cypress and raked the back of his hand wearily across his eyes. But he had barely relaxed when the hound pups roared into a bedlam of disagreement over the last remaining bone of their meager breakfast.

He crouched, tense with fear.

The cabin door flew open; and Lochinvar, dressed except for his pants, issued forth, bearing a stew-pot of water that gave off a swirl of steam. "Shet up!" he bellowed. He swung the vessel, so that the hot water spread and fell without sparing a pup.

"Oooooooh-urp!" they squalled as one, and scattered with tucked tails, each in the direction of hasty choice.

"Dang yore hides!" Mr. Poteet said softly. "I'm gonna write Doc Horton



Lochinvar yelled,

and the Desperado

by
W. T. Person

ILLUSTRATED BY
LYLE JUSTIS

this mornin'. No use puttin' it off no longer, just 'cause I got sediment fer Fanny."

The man stole up the lake bank. Screened by a clump of crimson sumac, he studied the scene intently. The sight of Mr. Poteet's reedy unslad legs reassured him. His lips curled a little as he pushed through the sumac.

"Hello!" he called.

Lochinvar wheeled quickly, and his blue eyes raced over the unkempt figure.

"Mornin'," he said, and waited for the man to come up.

"I'm hungry," the stranger said.

"You look lost, too," said Lochinvar.

"I was hunting fox," the man said quickly. "We got separated."

Lochinvar's eyes narrowed. Many men had disappeared for reasons of their own in the vast swamp, and an



important tenet in the lowland code was not to ask strangers uninvited questions.

"Hey!" he yelled, remembering and turning a light turkey-red. "I aint got on no britches!" He leaped for the cabin door, the tail of his white home-boiled shirt whipping behind him. "Come on in," he called back, "an' I'll roust you up some vittles."

Inside, he pulled on his snuff-brown Sunday pants, being careful to preserve the light crease he had put in them by stamping on the upper of two planks between which he had folded the trousers.

The man's quick, hard eyes studied the room from the doorway. Then he came in. His air was a trifle contemptuous.

"Set," Lochinvar invited. "I'll heat some coffee an' fry you some seasonin' meat. I've et."

The stranger relaxed in a shuck-bottom chair. His eyes roved steadily about the room. They rested longest on the old squirrel-rifle on its deer-foot rack over the mirror. A leather cartridge pouch swung from one of the up-bent feet.

Lochinvar sliced generously from a slab of salt-cured sidemeat; then he "freshened" it by boiling it in the skillet before draining the water off and setting it to frying. He sprinkled water over cold biscuits, dropped them into a brown paper bag, twisted the open end tight, and placed it in the oven.

"Like thick gravy?" he asked pleasantly. "I aint got a smidgin of butter."

"I like gravy." The stranger's eyes wandered back to the rifle.

Lochinvar dropped his own soiled dishes into a pan of water on the stove, and set a place at the table. He forked the sizzling meat onto a piece of brown paper, which would absorb the grease, sprinkled flour into the skillet, dumped in salt and black pepper, stirred fast until the flour browned. Then he added water, sending up a cloud of sharp steam.

"Want to wash up?" Lochinvar asked, nodding toward the old cedar bucket and the tin basin on the shelf at the left of the mirror. "Soap's in that ter'pin shell."

THE man washed his face and hands, dried them vigorously on the clean coarse sack that Lochinvar had given him for a towel.

Lochinvar poured black coffee. "You'll have to drink it in mournin'," he said. "I git cream same place I git butter."

There were sunburned streaks in the stranger's hair. Mr Poteet noted something else, too: the fellow's thick fingertips were slick, and three of them bore ugly, puffed cracks. What else besides cotton-picking in cold dew and light frost could have left those marks? Yet the man had said he had been hunting fox. If so, where was his horse? It was all very confusing.

He ate swiftly, untidily, cleaning up meat, gravy and biscuits, and sluicing them down with three cups of coffee.

Lochinvar finished dressing for his visit to Miss Flossie's. His faded moss-



"That's it! Now come on!"



Mr. Poteet went closer to the mirror. "Gittin' tufty as a dang' rabbit!" he said.

green tie offered the worst problem by refusing to come out with the little end shorter. After five defeats by this sartorial *gaucherie*, Mr. Poteet opened his pocket-knife, whacked off the offending portion and concealed the wounded end in his shirt.

"How much?" the stranger asked. "I'll pay you for—"

"This aint a restyran't," Lochinvar said shortly. "Save yore money till you git 'mongst Yankees an' 'Publicans."

"Thanks."

"You're welcome. Drop yore dishes in the pan on the stove. You can wash up ag'in, if you want to."

As the man moved toward the water-shelf, he looked with covert amusement at Mr. Poteet, who was now before the mirror, parting his thin hair in the middle and plastering it down tight against his narrow scalp. "Going away today?" he inquired.

"Yup. I do a little sparkin' in good weather."

The fellow washed and dried his hands, rubbed mouth and chin with the sack. He turned back to Lochinvar. "My clothes are bad," he said with an inclusive gesture to call attention to the snags and rips. "Do you have some old ones you'll sell me?"

"Might have some old overalls an' a jumper," Lochinvar raked hard with the brush, bringing the recalcitrant wisp to terms. "I'll git 'em." He

went into the windowless rear room, shoved open the rickety door for light.

When he returned a moment later, the man was studying the old long-barreled rifle intently. "These aint worth more'n two dollars," Lochinvar said. "Pull 'em on over your duds. They'll keep you warmer, also comfortable where the briars is bad."

But the fellow rolled overalls and jacket into a bundle. "Later," he said. "How far is it to the highway?"

"A mile an' a quarter. The log-road at the head of the slough out yonder leads to it. Four mile on to Buckville."

"What'll you take for that rifle?"

"Ol' Becky aint fer sale. She was Grandpa's. Besides, she's awful ramshackle, an' you might have trouble shootin' her."

"I'd learn. How about three dollars?"

Lochinvar viewed him with waning patience. "She aint fer sale, friend. Why, I can 'bark' a squ' at a hundred yards with that rifle, and I can put a middle eye in a 'coon's face, no matter how high a cyp'es he's in. She just aint fer sale."

The man shrugged, muttered, "Thanks," and went out the door.

Lochinvar, his pale brows knit, watched the stranger's departure, noting that he followed around the edge of the cabin-clearing, instead of walking across the opening. Then he said, "H'm!" slowly, and abandoned the crack in the wall.

The next fifteen minutes Mr. Poteet devoted to the composition of a letter

on ruled tablet paper. It was addressed to Dr. Horton, leading resident of Buckville and president of the Fox Hunters' Association of Buck County:

Dere doctor, i got five pups (5) to sell. Theyre bout 1/2 groan an gittin bigger ever day an i aint got the extry grub to feed em. That's the reasin im willin to sell. Their mammy is my bich Fanny but i dont know who the daddy is. They got noses like Fanny though an theyre 100 per scent houn. Theyre allready trailin rabbits an treein possums an their voices is high-rollin an clear as a bell whichll make a musicky foxrace. If you want a hellashious dog bargin git in tech with

yores resp

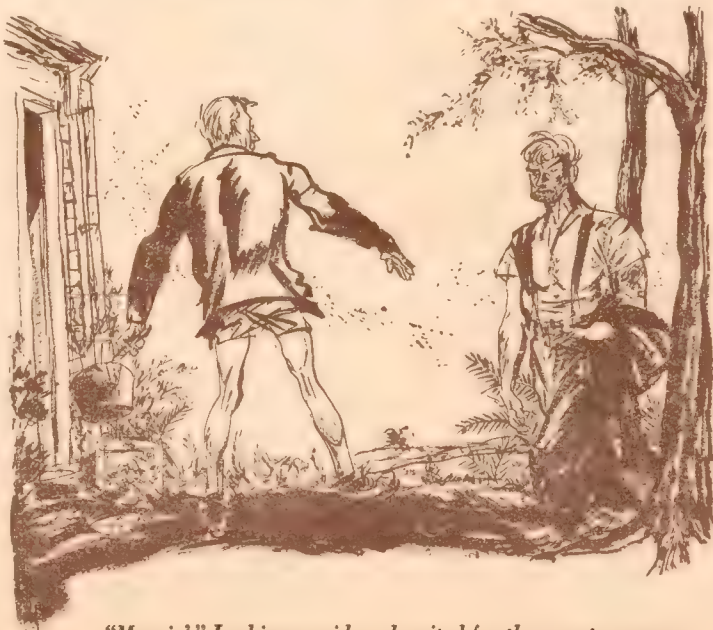
L. Poteet

P.S. Fanny is part walker an part july.

Mr. Poteet paused there. His expression of sadness hinted that he had struck what he considered the jackpot of wit. He finished the P.S.: "The pups is part Fanny an part accident. ha ha."

By now it was high time to be getting on to Miss Flossie's. Lochinvar went out and corralled the pups in an abandoned pole-built pigpen. They turned their thin noses skyward and raised deafening protest. The woods rang with their high-rolling howls.

Shortly, Mr. Poteet was ready to go. He had put on his narrow-brimmed black felt hat and the coat to match his pants; he had wrapped the cat-



"Mornin'," Lochinvar said, and waited for the man to come up.

fish in heavy paper; he had taken the violin-case down from its peg and raked four dirt-dauber nests from it.

He paused at the door, thinking. Then he reached up to the left and took the rifle down. He thumbed back the hammer. A moment later he lowered it lovingly into place and slid the old gun back onto its rack.

The five cartridges in the pouch rattled mellowly. Lochinvar's main stock of precious ammunition was buried in a tin coffee can beneath a loose floor plank. He propped the back-room door with a length of scantling, went out the front door, locked it and departed.

HE dropped his letter to Dr. Horton into the mail-box at the black-top highway, raised the flag, took to the right and headed eagerly for Miss Flossie Judson's place. He walked with a long, loose gait. A light mist of catfish aroma swirled behind him. The morning was warming up, and the highway was sunny. Courtin' had its penalties, all right! It must be danged-awful hot, pickin' cotton! He hoped Miss Flossie would invite him to stay for lunch. . . .

At last Mr. Poteet looked fondly upon the white-with-green-trim Judson bungalow in the large yard, which was set with roses and shrubs and enclosed by a neat whitewashed paling fence.

He entered the gate with a dignity worthy of his mission.

Miss Flossie came to the door in answer to his knock. She was a large woman of positive air, backed up by a red face, a mannish voice—cultivated for business dealings—and small, shrewd blue eyes. She gasped lightly at sight of her caller.

"Morning, Mist' P'teet," she greeted him, noting in one swift-darting glance the splendor of his raiment, the violin-case, and the paper-wrapped bundle from which emanated the unmistakable odor of warm catfish. "Won't you come in?"

"Thankee, ma'am." Lochinvar removed his hat carefully and bowed. "It's a pleasure to set eyes on you this bright fall mornin', Miss Flossie. I've bring you some catfish, dressed—"

"Come in and have a chair," she broke in, taking the bundle. "Thank you. I'll put the fish in the electric."

"You're plumb welcome. They're right fresh-caught, none over a poun' an' a half." Then with pride, to deepen her appreciation: "They was skunt alive, ever' one."

Miss Flossie winced visibly, and headed for the kitchen.

When she returned, Mr. Poteet was making himself at home, sitting cross-legged in the big cherry rocker and dusting his fiddle with a red bandanna. She sat on the sofa.



"This aint a restyrant," Lochinvar said. "Save yore money."

"I aint fiddled in a awful spell," he apologized. "Bet my fingers is as stiff as cucumbers."

"Cotton-picking might supple them up," she suggested. "I'm paying a dollar seventy-five a hundred."

Lochinvar smiled sadly. "Miss Flossie, ever' man to his work. Mine's fishin' an' trappin'. I aint cut out fer pickin' cotton." He twanged the E string. "Purty tone, aint it? Gran'-pa brung this fiddle out of Ca'liny into Kentucky. It's—"

"The Wittlys are doing all they can," she broke in, "but Jim Buck's across the water, you know. If I don't get some more pickers, I don't know *what* I'll do!"

"Look, Miss Flossie: if I was a good picker, I'd be out there a-snatchin' it fer you; but I wouldn't pick enough to stuff a woodpecker's hole. Besides, just tryin' would wear my sperrits down to a nub." He plucked a heavier string. "Aint that meller? Gran'-pa tol' Pa 'bout playin' all night onct fer a square dance in the Kentuck' hills. All he got out of it was a gallon of corn liquor an' the moonshiner's daughter. She turned out to be my gran'-ma."

"Why, Mist' P'teet!" Her voice rose girlishly. "That was *all* he got!" And wittily: "Everyone must pay the fiddler—even a moonshiner!"

Lochinvar smiled wanly. "You're cute sometimes."

"Speaking of cotton," Miss Flossie resumed, a light in her eye, "I've ap-

plied to the State Government for help. I've heard that convicts are being used on some of the larger plantations."

"H'm, convicts?" Lochinvar stared at her. "Convicts—pickin' cotton?"

"It was in the paper." She shuddered. "I'm desperate for pickers, but I'd really be frightened to have desperadoes on my place. What if one of them escaped? Mr. P'teet, I'd be petrified!"

LOCHINVAR swallowed lightly, recalling his guest of the morning: the slick, cracked fingertips, the many evidences that he was a fugitive—

"You c'd al'us call on me, Miss Flossie. 'Twould be a priv'lege to per-tect ye."

"Thank you, Mist' P'teet. But what if he was bigger and stronger than you, and had a gun? What would you do?"

"I wouldn't be skeered." He drew himself up with pride. "I got as far as the Argonne in '18."

"You *did*?" Then she turned practical again. "What would you do?"

"Well, I'd just outfigger him. Got to outfigger a dang' desp'rado." He stood fondling the old fiddle. "Le's tackle a tune."

"I'll try to chord with you." But her manner was dubious as she sat on the plush-covered organ stool and pulled out certain stops. "I hardly ever play any more." She began to pump, making squeaky noises.

Lochinvar swept the bow surely across a string, giving off a bell-clear tone. "Match that, an' we'll try 'Kiss Waltz'."

Miss Flossie blushed delicately on the back of her neck and mashed various combinations of keys, until Lochinvar yelled: "That's it! Now, come on!" He swung into the old favorite with swift certainty; he was swaying, and his right foot was patting out time.

But Miss Flossie floundered, unable to keep within chording distance of the fiddle Gran'pa Poteet had brought out of Ca'l'ny to win a moonshiner's daughter in Kentucky's hills. It was dismal; on the organ's side, it was a wilderness of discord.

"Keep a-hittin' 'em!" Lochinvar cried, "You'll find it d'rectly." The room rang brightly with the voice of the fiddle.

WHEN it was ended, with a flourish of the bow, Miss Flossie wailed: "I was dreadful! You play, Mist' P'teet. I didn't dream you were such a violinist!"

"I bet you never dreamed nothin' 'bout me," Lochinvar said boldly. Then he saw her look of grim primness. "What you want me to play?" he asked meekly. (He ought to be going. The convict was getting farther away all the time, but this was a tender moment: He was at last playing for Miss Flossie, and he was not disposed to let anything interfere with this delight.)

"Play whatever you wish," she told him. "I'm right fond of the violin." She sat on the sofa.

Lochinvar's heart bumped. "All my folks is musicky," he said. "Now, here's a mixtry of tunes I've picked up in my roamin's from Yaller Rabbit to Vinegar Bend."

Whereupon he shucked his coat and played. He stood by the organ and lost himself in a medley of old tunes. Chin on fiddle, face very sad, he sang with the bow, moaned with the bow, laughed with the bow—and the patting of his foot was a tune's heart-beat. It was music from the hills and hollows of America, music born in old Ireland and Scotland and England to soothe the growing-pains of early America . . . Music of pioneer campfires . . . Music of the slave's heart as he sang his low, sad minors in the hot, tangled swamp he was making into endless vistas of soft, cruel cotton . . . Music of the master, who stepped the mincing minuet on the high-polished floor that was salty beneath its sheen with the black singer's sweat.

Mr. Poteet knew none of this. He was playing tunes he knew and loved, and it was music out of the vast combinations of influences and beings

whence he had sprung. The bow leaped high, and the bow dragged low, and sweet tunes flowed from beneath the bow.

Miss Flossie had to shut her eyes to believe her ears. Was this the man whom Todd Gorman had belittled to her as "a piece of floatin' white trash that had better float on to other parts?" Was this the man Mr. Gorman was threatening to complain to the Game and Fish Commission about, because he kept starved hounds that were a menace to wild turkey and other game? Surely not! Or perhaps Mr. Gorman was prejudiced. She smiled covertly.

The bow was still racing when the howling began under the window. It was a sad wailing, dismal with pain, rising and falling, lingering on the air and trailing out into a quavering minor:

"Ahhh—ooohhhhooohhh—ooohhhh—
hhhhooo—Ahhhooo—"

Lochinvar wheeled to the window. "Shet up, Fanny!" he bellowed. And,



"I've brung you some catfish," said Mr. Poteet.

pridefully, to Miss Flossie, who was wide-eyed on the sofa: "That's my Fanny. She al'us does that when I play."

"Hey! Miss Flossie! Mr. Poteet!" It was a boy's voice that had arrived at the pyrotechnical state of vocal change known as "the goslins." "Shut up, Fanny! Hey, Miss Flossie!"

"Something's wrong!" Miss Flossie gasped. "Hear his voice flicker!" She hurried to the window, called: "Come in, Juke. What's wrong?"

The rangy, big-footed boy came in, and fast. He was panting; his blue eyes were popped, and his freckles stood out against his pale, excited face. His stiff red hair was in a state.

"It's a man-hunt!" he announced. "He's in the swamp, an'—"

"Who?" Miss Flossie cried. "Who's in the swamp?"

"The convict cotton-picker that escaped from the Hull Plantation, over in Duckett County, yestiddy evenin'."

"Oh!" she gasped, twitching throughout. "A convict!"

"Yes'm. A plane's been circlin', lookin' for him, all mornin'. A cordon's been th'owed aroun' the swamp, an'—"

"It's a big swamp," Lochinvar said calmly as he replaced fiddle in case. "They got bloodhoun's on his trail yet?"

"They had 'em, but the houn's lost his trail t'other side the lake up there. I'd like to he'p ketch 'im, I would! If Jim Buck was here, he'd be in the thick of it. Dammit all, I'm big enough to—"

"Juke!" Miss Flossie scolded. "Don't be profane before a lady."

"Aw, hell, I forgot," he said contritely. "Why, Lord A'mighty—scuse me, Miss Flossie. I—"

"I got to go," Lochinvar broke in. "I'll take Fanny with me."

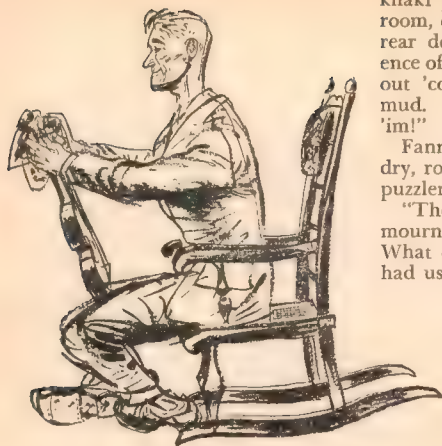
"Lemme keep her," Juke begged. "If I git her on his trail, I'll—"

"Fanny aint a bloodhoun'. Besides, you might git hurt, boy."

"Me?" It came out falsetto. Juke reddened. "Me?" he repeated, managing a froggy bass this time. "Look, Fanny went to school with me today. At recess we played a game, an' she's a good bloodhoun': We'd let her smell a boy's hank'chief or his shirt-tail, an' then we'd blindfold her while he run off an' hid. She'd trail him right down, she would, ever' time. If I had me a piece of that desp'rado's clo'es, I c'd ketch him with Fanny, I could!"

"She's got a pow'ful nose, all right," Lochinvar conceded. He turned to Miss Flossie and said with stiff, courtly bow: "I'll come back when things quiet down. We'll play 'Kiss Waltz' some more."

"What if he comes here?" she asked. "I'm scared, Mist' P'teet!"



Mr. Poteet was making himself at home, sitting in the cherry rocker and dusting his fiddle.

"But I got to go," he told her. "Don't be afeared."

And he went. Fanny moved ahead of him along the highway, with the odd, sidewise trot common to her kind—"to keep from flyin'," so some say. Lochinvar's mind was working fast: He had unwittingly aided and abetted the fugitive; if Todd Gorman learned of that, he'd make much of it. Fanny could trail a man. She had trailed her master many times. He recalled Juke's game at school. If only the convict had changed clothes there at the cabin!

AT last they reached home. Lochinvar opened the padlock on the piece of trace chain through the hole in the door, and went in.

He stopped short, squinting against the poor light. Someone had been there! He felt it without at first knowing why.

Then he knew why: The back room was too light. The door he had propped with the scantling was cracked open! Lochinvar wheeled to the gun rack. . . .

The rifle was gone. The cartridge-pouch still hung from the up-bent deer foot, but it was empty. He looked sharply about the room; there were no other signs of theft.

"An' I fed 'im free!" Lochinvar said slowly and with bitter contempt. "The unappreciatin' varmint!"

Wrath boiled up in him, terrible righteous wrath. It was the first time Ol' Becky had been stolen in her career of three generations of Poteets, protecting them, feeding them, acquiring a personality to grace her utility.

Lochinvar flung off his Sunday clothes, pulled on shirt and pants of khaki, pushed bare feet into knee-length gum boots, caught up his floppy black felt hat. He removed a small object from a pocket of his Sunday

coat, dropped it into a pocket of his khaki pants. He went into the back room, calling Fanny. Stooping in the rear doorway, he indicated the presence of a trail—as he had often pointed out 'coon tracks for her in sand or mud. "Git 'im!" he ordered. "Trail 'im!"

Fanny sniffed indifferently along the dry, rough planks, then looked up in puzzlement, wagging her thin tail.

"The double-dang' desp'rado!" mourned Mr. Poteet. Then a thought: What of the knife and fork the man had used? No good: They had been

Fanny snuffled, pulled away, sneezed, wagged her bony tail.

Lochinvar snatched up a piece of newspaper, wrapped the precious sack towel, shoved it into his coat pocket. He whacked off a ten-foot length of trot-line staging for a leash.

"Le's go!" he called.

FANNY found the trail just outside the back door, and announced her strike by looking heavenward and giving tongue in a clear, lingering bugling that rang through the woods and echoed against the line of autumn-browned cypresses across the lake. The five pups answered from the pole-pen, yelping and howling in unison. But Fanny ignored them. This was business. She moved ahead, nose to ground, and again poured the wooded lowland full of her ringing hound-music.

"You got the amen corner," Lochinvar said joyously, "an' it's yore time to shout!"

The going was very slow for a time. When Fanny lost the trail, Mr. Poteet applied the sack to her nose, and she found the way again. The fugitive had dodged, circled, back-tracked for a half-mile, as if deliberately trying to confuse a trailing hound. The afternoon was wearing away.

"Slick!" Lochinvar whispered appreciatively, over and over.

At last the trail bore westward without flourishes. The sun was a great soft disk against the hazy horizon. The air was cooling fast, but the trail was warming. Fanny's voice went up

"If I don't get some pickers I don't know what I'll do!" said Miss Flossie.



every few steps, and she strained eagerly ahead. Her tail was thrashing fast.

They rounded a slough. There the trail veered deeper to the southwest, making for the highway. With the rifle, the fugitive might force a ride and escape. Lochinvar followed fast, the leash taut.

They crossed the barbed-wire line between Dr. Horton's vast timberland and the swamp block of Miss Flossie's quarter. When the sun was red on the edge of the world, they were within two hundred yards of the black-top. It was almost dark in the swamp. Fanny was r'arin' on a red-hot trail; Lochinvar was leaping after her.

A car was stopping on the highway. Lochinvar held Fanny, and listened, fearing that the convict was catching a ride.

"Hey, Poteet!" a man yelled. "What's your dog trailin'?"

Lochinvar snorted, recognizing Deputy Gorman's voice, and went on.

"Halt! Officer Gorman speaking. I know your hound's voice, Poteet. That land's posted!"

"You go smack to hell!" Lochinvar howled. "Git on, Fanny!"

"I'm comin' after you!" Gorman yelled. "You're resistin' the law!"

"Go soak yore head in brackly stump-water!" Lochinvar howled. . . .

Lochinvar and Fanny were almost even with Miss Flossie's house when Juke called: "Whooooo-eeee, Mr. Poteet! You chasin' 'possum?"

"Stay whur you're at," Lochinvar yelled. "Watch the highway."

It was almost dark in the swamp. Fanny was r'arin' on a red-hot trail; Lochinvar followed fast, the leash taut.



"Eeeee-yowww!" Juke exulted. "Let 'im alone, Mr. Gorman!"

"Dry up!" Gorman snapped. "You're abettin' that swamp-angell!"

"But he aint huntin' four-legged game! Goshdammit, wake up!"

"Your pa'll frail you for that!" Gorman raged. "I'm goin' after Poteet!"

"Juke, what's wrong out there?" Miss Flossie cried shrilly.

"Git back in the house!" he belowered. "This is man-business! Lock yore door an swaller the key!"

"Lord, be with me!" she screamed. The door slammed.

"Ah-ooohhh!" Fanny roared. "Ah-oooh! Ah-oooh! Ah-ooohhhhh!" She was lunging ahead, and Lochinvar was leaping after her, crashing through brush, bearing down switch-cane, straddling saplings.

"Yonder he goes!" Juke screamed. "Hell, he's got a gun! Hey, Mr. Gorman, bring yore six-shooter! Mr. Gorman! Come here!"

LOCHINVAR dropped the leash and raced toward Juke's voice. Fanny sprang ahead with a fearful roaring. "Watch 'im!" Lochinvar cried. "Foller 'im!" It was now purple dusk.

When he burst out into the right-of-way, Fanny was already crossing the black-top, quartering toward Miss Flossie's yard.

Fanny's head was high, and she was going full tilt, giving tongue at each leap. Ahead of her and Juke, a crouching, shadowy figure lurched toward the yard.

"Halt, Poteet!" Deputy Gorman called from the woods-edge.

Lochinvar grunted angrily, kicked off his clumsy boots and sprinted after Fanny. Juke and the fugitive.

Fanny was gaining. She passed



"You're slick!" Juke said reverently. "You're slick as a of 'coon!"

Juke and bore down on the convict, whose lips had long since lost their curl of contempt. He was now a cornered animal with nothing left but a mad last stand.

He reached the gate three yards ahead of the hound, reeled through it, slammed it shut. Panting, he crouched behind a gatepost, cocked the rifle, waited. He wanted to shoot the raging hound, but there were only five shells.

A car was coming along the highway. Its lights revealed Lochinvar and Juke, both barefooted, sprinting at top speed toward Miss Flossie's. It drew even with Lochinvar.

"What's happening?" a man called. "I'm Dr. Horton. How's the man-hunt progressing?"

"Turn yore lights on Miss Flossie's yard, Doc," Lochinvar panted. "He's there!"

Dr. Horton swung past Lochinvar, careened around Juke, drew off the shoulder. Twin headlights flooded the yard brilliantly, revealing the crouched figure and the rifle.

"Don't git out!" Juke screamed as he pulled up on the safe side of the car. "He's desp'rate!"

"Where's Gorman?" Dr. Horton asked. "He's supposed to be after—"

"He's in the woods," Lochinvar panted, "tryin' to ketch a *trusspasser*!" Then he passed the car and went toward the gate.

"Watch out!" Juke screamed. "He's pokin' the gun th'ool! Gosh A'mighty, he'll shoot you!"

"Drop my rifle," Lochinvar ordered. "Drop it, you thievin'—"

The man snarled, brought the gun to his shoulder.

But Lochinvar went on toward the gate. Barefooted, bareheaded, his thin sandy hair boxing the compass, he was a ludicrous figure in the bright light.

"You're caught now," he drawled. "Lay Becky down."

"Don't be a fool, Poteet!" Dr. Horton begged. "We'll surround—"

"Mist' P'tee!" Miss Flossie cried from an upstairs window. "Don't you get shot!"

"Dry up, Miss Flossie! I mean, *shet up, Fanny*! Yes'm, Miss Flossie."

"Stop, or I'll kill you!" the convict warned. His cheek was tight against the slim stock, and his eyes glinted hard. His forefinger curved into the trigger guard.

Juke ducked into the darkness, ran silently along the fence.

Lochinvar's bare feet crunched dry gravel in front of Miss Flossie's gate as he walked slowly toward the gun. It looked like madness, deliberate and suicidal madness. There was, suddenly, no sound save that of the gravel.

Dr. Horton flipped off his lights—that might save Poteet, if he ducked in time.

There was a sharp *click*. . . .

"She snapped," Lochinvar said calmly. "Hey, turn on them lights!"

When the lights came on, the man was clawing the hammer back.

DEPUTY GORMAN'S car was coming now.

"Try it again," Lochinvar suggested. "Now, aint you in a mess!"

The convict cursed—the hammer clicked again, empty.

"Drop it," Lochinvar ordered, reaching for the gate-latch.

Juke moved swiftly and silently into the lighted area behind the man.

He was crouched, on the point of leaping. Lochinvar stopped him:

"Wait, boy. We don't need no scuffle." He opened the gate.

The convict turned and saw Juke. Then he shrugged resignedly and came to his feet. "Okay," he said meekly. "You win."

"Dern it!" Juke mourned. "T'd 'a' had 'im pinned in a minute!"

Deputy Gorman piled out of his car and hustled forward. "I arrest you in the name of the Law," he announced loudly.

"It's high time you did something in the name of the Law," Dr. Horton told him. "Looks to me like Poteet is a good man to have in the swamp. He and his hound made this capture, didn't they?"

"I don't know the details," Gorman growled.

"All right, take Poteet's captive to jail. If there's a reward, I'll see that Poteet gets it. And if you don't lay off him, I'll have a heart-to-heart talk with both the Sheriff and the Game and Fish Commission. You understand, I'm sure."

Gorman said nothing. He snapped handcuffs on the prisoner and pushed him toward his car.

"Oh, Mist' P'tee!" Miss Flossie called. "You were so brave!"

"Aw, it wasn't nothin'," he assured her with dignified modesty.

"Won't you have fish supper with me?" she asked. "You *must* be hungry! Come right in, won't you?"



"It's a man-hunt!" Juke announced.

"Yes'm, thankee. I aint et since mornin'. . . . Hey, no'm! I can't come in now. I'm *barefooted*!"

"That won't keep you from being hungry," she reasoned, and with surprising logic for a woman, thought Lochinvar.

"I got your letter this afternoon. Poteet," said Dr. Horton. "We can make a deal on the pups, I'm sure. Would you sell the dog by the fence, there? She has a real voice."

"Thunder, Doc, that's Fanny! She aint fer sale."

"I can understand that." The Doctor smiled, and slapped Lochinvar on his thin shoulder. "See me next time you're in town, and we'll talk pups. You're a brave man, Poteet. What if that rifle hadn't snapped?"

"T'd 'a' been hurt. She's a awful hard-shootin' gun."

AS Dr. Horton's car followed Gorman's toward Buckville, Lochinvar and Juke stood in the darkness.

"Well, I did sorta he'p, didn't I?" Juke asked hopefully.

"You shore did, boy. Le's hunt my hat an' boots. Danged if I set at Miss Flossie's table *barefooted*!"

"I'll he'p you hunt 'em," Juke offered. "She's nice, aint she?"

"Fust-rate," Lochinvar agreed; "she's plumb fust-rate."

They started along the highway. Juke said admiringly: "Balls o' fire, you got sand, walkin' right onto that rifle! I aint ever seen nobody that brave before!"

Lochinvar was quiet for a few steps. "Don't you tell a soul, boy," he said finally, "an' specially Miss Flossie, fer it won't hurt a thing if she thinks I'm a reg'lar hellcat; but I knowed that rifle wouldn't shoot."

Juke's mouth popped open. "How'd you know it? They was a cat'idge in it. I looked while you an' Doc Horton was talkin'."

"Well, you see, I give that convict his breakfast this mornin'. He was so int'rested in Ol' Becky, that I figgered he might come back after her, so just before I left the house I took the plunger out. . . . It slips right out when the hammer's back. I got it here in my pocket now."

"Well, I be derned!" Juke cried. "But if you figgered he'd come back after Ol' Becky, why'n't you *hide* her so he couldn't steal—"

"It was better to let him tote somethin' he *thought* would shoot, 'stead of fixin' things so he might manage for a gun he could kill somebody with. See?"

"You're slick!" Juke said reverently. "You're slick as a ol' coon!"

Lochinvar spat, accepting the tribute. "You got to outfigger a dang' desp'rado," he declared contentedly. "I tol' Miss Flossie that."



ARMY MULE



PACK-TRAIN of mules wound down the mountain trail from a mine in the Mexican province of Sonora, not far south of the American border. It was early in the year of 1871, and still chilly in the heights. The train moved briskly.

The leading mule had something on his mind and had decided to pass it on. His long ears swiveled backward and forward and sideways. The mule behind him took note and flipped his ears through the same set of motions. Promptly the third mule relayed them on. It was plain that a message of some sort was being wigwagged from mule to mule, all the length of the long line of heavily laden animals.

A man, tall and spare, was watching from the floor of the cañon into which the trail descended. Iron-gray hair decided beneath his flat-crowned sombrero. His buckskin coat, girded loosely at the middle, somehow resembled a monk's robe. He smiled, and crinkles at the corners of deep-set brown eyes augmented the seams of his bronzed visage, as he watched the mules' signaling system operate. Himself a *patrón*—leader of pack-trains—he had seen that system work far too often to doubt it. Now it seemed to be spelling trouble, though none of the muleteers up there had taken notice. That leading mule had laid his ears back often and ominously. The observer surmised: "Probably his pack is galling his back. He will halt till they adjust it."

Halt he did; and every other mule in the trail halted on the instant with military precision.

From mid-train a stout man on horseback, who was evidently the *patrón*, shouted impatiently. Gingerly a muleteer approached the leading mule, grasped his halter-shank and tried to lead him on. With proverbial obstinacy the animal refused to budge. Now the *patrón's* shouts rose louder and angrier. The muleteer pulled a club from his belt and dealt a resounding whack to the balker's immobile rump.

That rump suddenly swung into action—it whirled like a gun revolving to bear on its target. A pair of flashing iron-shod hoofs was discharged point-blank. Only a leap of astonishing agility over the edge of the trail saved the clubber. Yelping, he went rolling down the slope to the bottom of the cañon. Following him came a torrent of

mules; the rebel had thrust back along the trail wall and playfully shoved them off. The cañon was filled with a cloud of dust and a chorus of resounding brays. Pack-lashings burst, and ore cargoes were scattered far and wide. Fifty carefree mules celebrated their holiday, kicking and cavorting. The mule that had started the ruckus slid down himself and, having rolled off his own objectionable pack, stood gazing at the rioting and wreckage about him with an air of supreme satisfaction.

A sigh supplanted the broadened smile of the tall man who had watched it all. He foresaw the inevitable sequence of crime and punishment and he could not place any blame on the mule. He could see now, verifying his guess, that there were sores on the poor beast's back. If the padding of the *aparejo* had been adjusted so that the weight of the pack had not borne on those raw spots, all this might have been avoided. But it was none of his affair. This was another's pack-train. The man sadly, the mule stolidly, awaited retribution.

It came in the person of the stout *patrón* galloping his horse down from the trail, his eyes red with wrath at the scene of devastation. He reined up in front of the cause of it all and poured a flood of anathemas, imprecations, and oburgations on his long head.

Probably the mule has inspired more strong language than any other creature or object from ancient times on. Assyrians, Egyptians, Hebrews, Greeks, and Romans all knew him and berated him. As a modern contribution to a long and illustrious line of maledictions, the *patrón's* effort ranked rather well. His Spanish sibilants fairly seethed. He reflected on his victim's ancestry, which was mixed—the mule being the offspring of an ass and a mare—but the *patrón* mixed it much more, adding uncomplimentary forebears by the dozen with a fine disregard of natural history. He referred to the fact that the mule is without hope of posterity—which in this particular case, he proclaimed, was a blessing unalloyed, and if nature in her wisdom had not already so ordained it, he, the *patrón*, would. This beast as a prime example of ingratitude, perfidy, malevolence and downright depravity must no longer encumber a world already too full of trials, tribulations, and troubles!

The *patrón* paused for breath. Out of large brown eyes the mule regarded him solemnly and even, it ap-



General Crook leads his men against the Apaches A complete novel

by *FAIRFAX DOWNEY*

peared, with a certain grudging admiration for his fluency. But the owner's fury had not subsided with the tirade. Only action would quench it. He drew a rifle from his saddle-boot and sighted between the mule's eyes.

"Die a death well deserved!" he condemned.

Quickly the tall stranger stepped forward and spoke. "God sends nothing but what can be borne."

With courtesy the *patrón* lowered his gun to reply:

"So I believed, señor, until He sent me this mule."

"The mule has lightened his own load. Perhaps he too believed himself overburdened."

The other showed annoyance, inspired by a twinge of conscience. He knew the charge was true. Shrugging, he answered:

"The beast has caused me trouble on many occasions. And now, señor, if you will step aside—" Once more he raised the rifle. He took careful aim and his finger crooked around the trigger.

The mule did not even blink. Mules are fatalists.

As the finger tightened, the stranger spoke again:

"*Señor Patrón*, would you not as soon dispose of this mule by sale as by slaughter? I will buy him."

GREED STRUGGLED WITH WRATH, and the gun-muzzle lifted. But the fat *patrón* was not altogether ready to forego the satisfaction of revenge for manifold injuries.

"No," he reluctantly refused. "It would be a deadly sin to sell so malignant an animal. I would share the guilt of the man who palmed him off on me. Señor, it is plain that you do not know mules, especially such a one as this misbegotten son of a stubborn jackass and a wayward mare, this—"

"But I do know mules," the other interrupted. "I too lead pack-trains. I am named Luis de Val."

"Ah!" the exclamation was recognition of the name of one of the most noted *patrons* in Mexico. "You are he they call Fray Luis. You were once of the Franciscan Order."

"A lay brother, long ago. It is now many years since the brotherhood was expelled from Mexico. But come, *Señor Patrón*, you will wish to repack and proceed. Will you sell this mule?"

The owner spread flashy hands in a gesture of resignation. "As you will," he said, and the glint of the bar-

gainer was in his eyes. "I need not tell you he is a magnificent animal, strong and well-made. I suspect that he is a gringo mule, bred of their best stock. The American who sold him to me left before I could make full inquiries. If he seems intractable and slightly sour in disposition, that is only because he is a highly intelligent animal. He realizes that the destiny of the mule is no enviable prospect. You, of course, *Señor Patrón*, will know how to manage him. I myself had I had time to give him my personal attention and such kind but firm handling as—" He walked over toward the mule, stretching out his hand.

Eyes baleful, ears laid back, the mule whirled around, his mighty haunch muscles flexed. The *patrón* stepped hastily back.

"He is beyond redemption. Take him at any price," he snapped, and accepted the offer made him. Clinking pesos changed hands. Fray Luis spoke to the animal.

"Brother Mule," he said, addressing him according to the custom of the Franciscans with all creatures. "Brother Mule, henceforth let us journey together, you and I."

He walked over toward the tense beast. Long ears pricked forward but the mule did not stir. Smiling, the tall man stroked the brown neck a few minutes. Then he took the halter shank in hand and moved off, not looking back at the animal. The mule followed with docility. This tall man had a way with animals.

Over his shoulder Fray Luis called back the words of parting: "*Vaya con Dios—go with God.*"

The *patrón* flung after him: "How can I pray that you also may go with God, when I behold you departing in the company of a four-footed devil? Beware of that beast! You will learn that he embodies the Spanish proverb which asks a question and answers it."

"Which proverb, señor?"

"Whither goest thou, Misfortune? To where there is more."

The former Franciscan smiled, then said gravely:

"You call this mule a misfortune. It was mistreatment that made him so. Certainly it is my good fortune to have acquired so splendid an animal at so cheap a price. You are fond of proverbs, señor? Then I will give you back one which this dumb beast, could he speak, would gladly utter."

To the fat *patrón* it seemed for an instant—though it could only have been imagination—that the words which made him squirm with chagrin actually issued from the mule's mouth:

"Who beats his mule, beats his purse."

The mule and his new master moved off. A turn in the cañon hid them; back along its walls came echoing a superbly eloquent and deeply derisive bray.

CHAPTER TWO



HE mule was a bargain, and his new master became more aware of it with each passing day. Ill treatment had not had opportunity to harden the animal's rebelliousness, demonstrated that day in the cañon, into ingrained bad habits. Earlier owners apparently had trained and handled him well.

Fray Luis was certain that the mule, though he bore no brand, had been stolen from some American ranch or Army picket line. Plainly he came of the fine stock bred in Missouri, Tennessee, and Kentucky. Perhaps in his veins ran the blood of Royal Gift, the jack given by the King of Spain to George Washington in 1785, or of Lafayette's present to his General, the Maltese jack named Knight of Malta.

Groomed by his master, the mule's brown hide glistened, dappling on the strong haunches and shading off into buff on chest and belly. His legs were at once trim and sturdy and the hoofs unbroken. He flaunted his long ears like banners. His tail, accurate and agile, was the death of any fly venturing within its reach. The register of his bray was remarkable: it ranged from a shrill treble to sonorous tones suitable for the reading of a report by a judiciary committee.

Too small and light for draft—he stood fifteen hands high and weighed eleven hundred pounds—he was an ideal type of pack-mule, which must not be too tall for the convenient loading of cargo. Since his gait was smooth and there were rides to be made, his master broke him to saddle. He could always be shifted back to pack and used to lead a train.

But it was not pack-mules but pack-train men that Luis de Val was seeking—*arrieros*, as they are called in Spanish, a term which is properly translated into English as muleteers and promptly and unanimously rejected by Americans—who prefer to call them packers or by the lurid title of mule-skinners.

He sought certain dependable men, long known to him, men as handy with weapons as at throwing a diamond hitch. Any pack-train had to be able to defend itself against robbers or raiding Indians, for their cargo was often gold dust, silver ingots or high-assay ore from the mountain mines, or valuable goods carried long miles across the desert. But the train Fray Luis would lead as *patrón* was destined for especially arduous and dangerous service. It was only a dozen men he needed to man it, but every one of them must be tried and trusted.

Mounted on his new mule, he made a round of the settlements of Sonora and Chihuahua, on the route of trains down from the mines or coming north over the long weary desert journeys from Mexico City. He rode through sleepy plazas to adobe inns, where pack-train men gathered, and swung down from the saddle. Before he had finished caring for his animal, several *arrieros* were sure to recognize him. Widely respected as a *patrón*, he was also admired for his learning and liked for his quiet friendliness and the many kindnesses he did. Men addressed him as they would had he taken full vows—as "Fray," which means friar or brother—and treated him with a combination of reverence and comradeship.

Muleteers, greeting him warmly, cast glances of professional appraisal at the mule he had picketed—but glances

only, knowing that mules dislike prolonged inspection. Mules have found out that when people stand about and admire them, it is likely to lead to their being put through paces or forced to make some other vain and unnecessary effort. To avoid such foolishness, mules will lie down and roll in the dust. Therefore the muleteers spoke their praise out of the mule's sight and hearing, as one does with a child to avoid spoiling it.

Now and again Fray Luis drew a man aside—one of those reliable ones he desired. With words that produced a vivid play of emotions on his listener's face and prompted excited interjections, he described the service for which he was recruiting a pack-train.

It would be north of the Border—in Arizona—and with the American Army. Not only one train but five or six would be needed. Mules and all equipment would be supplied, but it was left to the *patrones* or packmasters to pick their own men. No, wagon-trains would not do as well. These pack-trains must move fast through desert, mountain, or forest.

Ai, ai! So it was to be a campaign against the Apaches! So the *americanos* at last would strike them in force! Bueno, it was high time!

There was to be a new commander, Fray Luis continued. A man known to him personally and who had, in fact, written to enlist his services as a *patrón*—one General George Crook. He was skilled in war and he was without a superior in knowledge of mules and pack-trains. All who served under him could count on just treatment. The pay was fair but the risk high. He, Fray Luis, would blame no man for declining.

At that, every man of his choice had smiled and simply asked: "Where and when will you have me, *patrón*?"

It was mostly men of Spanish blood like himself whom he recruited—men of Mexico or South America like Chileno Juan, who had driven mules in the Andes—men whose heritage was the ancient craft of the muleteer which the Spaniards learned from the Moors. But he sent messages across the Border to men he wanted to fill three of the posts in the train. For his *cargador* and second in command he selected a lanky New Englander known as Hank the Yank. His blacksmith was a retired American Army sergeant named Tobias, a big bearded fellow who looked like an Old Testament prophet. The *cencero* or cook was a little man called Whitey because of his albino hair. No one knew his nationality nor the rest of his name. He was renowned for his skill at preparing the hot Mexican dishes and for making even Army rations taste well. With the engagement of the cook, the personnel of the train was virtually complete.

Fray Luis appointed a rendezvous in Tucson, Arizona, two weeks hence. Every man he had chosen would be there, barring death or serious injury: that he knew. Entirely confident of them, the *patrón*, requiring to reach the rendezvous ahead of time, set out on his journey.

It was Chileno Juan, one of the last to be enlisted, who walked with him down to the picket line to caution him before they parted.

"*Patrón*," he urged, "I beg of you do not ride north alone. If you cannot wait two days for me, then find other company. At least if you ride alone, go armed."

"Friend," Fray Luis answered, "I never carry arms."

"I know your scruples, but I also know the Apaches," the Chilean protested. "I have wondered for years how you escaped being killed, riding alone through Apache country. It can only be your luck. It cannot be because you were a Franciscan. Your brotherhood and the Jesuits did well enough with other tribes, but neither order was able to make mission Indians of the Apaches. They would as soon murder a monk as another man—or even sooner."

"It is true we failed with the Apaches," Fray Luis sadly admitted. "Conquest, I have come to believe, is the only way with them—conquest and then fair treatment and



"Señor Patrón," said Fray Luis, "would you not as soon dispose of this mule by sale as by slaughter?"

honest help that they may follow the white man's path. That is why I lead an Army pack-train for my friend, the General, who when he conquers will deal justly with the conquered."

Chileno shrugged cynically. "*Quién sabe?*" he said. "Who knows? But do not let this mule carry you into an Apache ambush."

"Not he," the mule's master answered lightly. "Even if we did walk into an Apache trap, we would talk our way out of it."

"So? What is the name of this beast with the gift of tongues?"

Fray Luis hesitated. "Why, I don't know his name," he admitted. "I have called him only 'Brother Mule.' You see, his former owner traded him to me for a few pesos and a proverb, but failed to throw in his name."

"What proverb was it?" the other inquired with a grin. "The one that warns: 'Go in front of mules but go behind monks?'"

"No, another." The Franciscan laughed heartily.

"Call the mule Proverbio," suggested the Chilean. "Evidently he is proverbial—like your luck."

"So be it. He is named." Fray Luis mounted and called down: "Tucson in two weeks."

"*Hasta la vista,*" Chileno responded. "Till we meet again—if we do!"

CHAPTER THREE



ONLY rarely will a mule learn tricks such as can be taught a horse or a dog. He considers them beneath his dignity. He dislikes showing off—it bores him, and he seems to realize that it soon grows dull for those who have to watch it. But probably the principal reason for the mulish attitude toward man-taught tricks is that mules prefer to develop their own.

Every mule has a bag of them, ranging from schemes to avoid work when he is not feeling up to it, to ways of stealing a loaf of fresh-baked bread from the camp cook.

So it should be said that it was accomplishments, not tricks, that Fray Luis taught the mule Proverbio. He trained him to stand, to come at a whistle and to follow on command. In learning, the mule humored a master for whom he had begun to develop a certain fondness. That too was unusual; the relationship between man and mule is never that of master and pet nor of owner and slave, but of employer and workman. It may be a cold, practical working-arrangement or it may be characterized by tolerance and mutual respect and even admiration. But affection seldom enters into it. Mules are chary and cautious in that respect.

But this man had once worn the brown habit of St. Francis, and he followed the saint's precept of kindness to all creatures. That quality the mule had sensed the first day they met and had at first tentatively, then fully, taken the risk of becoming fond of him. On their long rides the man would talk aloud, and the mule, liking his voice, would listen attentively, slanting back his ears and now and then swiveling his long head around toward the man astride him. The man, much amused, would address the animal and answer for him in a different tone of voice. Thus he had whiled away hours on the journey across the Border and northward.

Now they were on its last lap, due to reach Tucson well before nightfall. The mule Proverbio, scenting journey's end, increased his pace. It was as if he trod a bright-colored carpet, for the winter rains had made



the desert bloom vividly with flowers, blue and golden and scarlet. Cactus plants worshipfully stretched spiny arms toward the sun. Here and there flourished an ironwood tree or paloverde or mesquite, which is both fuel and food for the Apache.

Except for the man and the mule, the desert seemed void of movement. Against a background of mountains, it lay hushed and still with the waning afternoon. About an hour and a half more would bring him to Tucson, Fray Luis estimated. The trail, well marked by travel, stretched clear before him. Yonder it dipped to enter a cañon whose walls for a space would afford grateful shade; about its entrance yucca plants flowered, their pure white blossoms gleaming and sunlit. "God's candles," Fray Luis reverently murmured.

Proverbio, anticipating the welcome coolness of the cañon, again quickened his pace and entered it. Yet no sooner had its walls closed about them than both the animal and his rider were seized by a feeling of foreboding. Fray Luis' grip tightened on the reins, and Proverbio faltered in his steady stride.

A few yards farther and the mule stopped dead in his tracks, his ears pricking forward on the alert.

IT WAS PROOF OF THE MAN'S understanding that he did not at once force the animal to go on, but spoke quietly to him as to a reasoning being.

"Brother Mule," he said, "I know you have not halted without cause. There is or has been something evil in this place. I also feel it faintly. But the trail is long and steep and roundabout if we do not pass through this cañon. Doubtless it is only the deep shadows that depress us. Let us go on."

The mule half lowered one ear as if to show he heard, but stood stock-still.

Another rider might have abused so balky a beast and whipped and spurred it ahead. Fray Luis only spoke again, this time in stern and admonitory tones.

Proverbio quivered under his master's words. It was almost as if they had been blows. Obviously against his will and his better judgment, the mule moved forward. Into the mind of the former Franciscan leaped a story from the Scriptures, the story of another rider and his reluctant mount. It was in a narrow place like this, "where was no way to turn either to the right hand or to the left," that Balaam's ass had thrice refused to go on, till her master smote her. Balaam, riding to meet the princes of Moab in disobedience of the Lord's com-

mand, had not been able to see the angel standing in the way—an adversary against him, drawn sword in hand. But the ass had beheld the shining one and had thrust herself against the wall, crushing her master's foot rather than carry him toward a peril he was too blind to see.

Impatiently Fray Luis thrust the old story out of his mind, yet it returned to haunt him. He never had lost his childhood belief in a guardian angel. Was *his* barring the path now? Sometimes animals seemed able to sense or see a presence invisible to man. What had made the mule stop so abruptly?

Proverbio, as if he had read his master's thoughts, again came to a dead halt.

This was folly, Fray Luis told himself in irritation. More sternly than before, even harshly, he ordered Proverbio forward—and the mule obeyed.

But that indefinable air of menace increased with every yard. It grew until it was almost ponderable, a weight on chests under which the lungs labored at breathing. Fray Luis' keen gaze swept the boulder-strewn slopes of the cañon walls, clear up to its frowning rims. He caught only a fleeting glimpse—but it was enough.

Beady black eyes beneath red sweatbands that bound back lank black locks were staring down on him. Copper-colored hands were fitting arrow notches to bowstrings or poisoning lances. Rifles would be ready but laid aside, for the range was short, and the Apache prefers to slay silently.

Fray Luis had passed through other Apache ambushes unscathed. Chileno had called it his luck, but it was rather that he was known to the southern tribes for deeds of kindness. This time, however, he could sense only a murderous hatred, the hatred of the Apache for the white man who had invaded his country, a hatred which this time would make no exception.

Spurring the mule into a gallop would not save them. Converging arrows and lances would cut them down in a few strides. Reins taut, Fray Luis rode on at the same steady pace. His voice, deep and loud, boomed suddenly through the cañon.

Why he began to speak he never quite realized. It was partly to break that deathly silence and to keep his courage high, and it was partly in prayer, for he knew himself to be in the presence of death. The words he spoke were the Scriptural story which the mule's balking had put in his mind.

"And when the ass saw the angel of the Lord, she fell down under Balaam: and Balaam's anger was kindled, and he smote the ass with a staff. And the Lord opened the mouth of the ass, and she said unto Balaam—"

Fray Luis changed the tone of his voice, as he had when he talked to Proverbio during their journey, and made it seem to be the mule asking him the question the ass had demanded of Balaam:

"What have I done unto thee, that thou hast smitten me these three times?"

For a moment Fray Luis thought the mule really had spoken, so successful had been the simulation, though he knew he had uttered the words himself. Loudly he gave Balaam's angry answer to the ass:

"Because thou hast mocked me. I would there were a sword in my hand, for now would I kill thee."

Proverbio turned his head back toward his master and from his mouth issued the plaintive reply:

"Am I not thine ass, upon which thou hast ridden since I was thine, unto this day? Was I ever wont to do so unto thee?"

"Nay," acknowledged Fray Luis, as had Balaam. He stroked the mule's neck in contrition for the harsh words with which he had forced him forward into this

ambuscade. Sweeping off his sombrero, he raised both hands toward the sky and with all his might shouted the end of the story:

"Then the Lord opened the eyes of Balaam, and he saw the angel of the Lord standing in the way."

With the speaking of the last word, the menace lifted as suddenly as it had descended. The spectacle of a crazy man and a mule actually talking to each other had been too much for superstitious savages! Lowering bow and lance, the Apaches hastily and silently melted back into the desert.

Fray Luis sighed, and his lips formed a prayer of thanks for deliverance from a cruel death. A strange gift—the ability to project his voice and make it seem that the mule was talking—had saved their lives. Until the moment of dire need he never had known that he possessed that power. What was it called—ventriloquism?

"Brother Mule," he said, "I thank you with all my heart and beg your forgiveness that I did not heed you."

"You are welcome and forgiven," he caused the mule to answer.

The man's smile faded swiftly; Proverbio once more had suddenly halted.

Just short of the farther end of the cañon they saw a limp figure, gagged and tightly bound to a barrel cactus studded with arrow shafts.

CHAPTER FOUR



DEFTLY and gently Fray Luis unbound the Apaches' victim. Distracted by the appearance of another white man, they had not had time to finish this one. His body was inert and he was only half conscious, but he was unhurt except where cactus thorns had cruelly pierced his arms and shoulders. The arrows studding the cactus plant had narrowly missed him.

His rescuer lifted him into Proverbio's saddle and steadied him there, walking alongside, as they moved off. He was young—not more than eighteen or nineteen. His clean-chiseled features were still boyish, his mop of jet-black hair unruly. What was this lad, wearing city clothes and visored sea-cap, doing in the desert? His deep blue eyes still stared into the distance, but they were growing clearer now. He moaned:

"I was afraid—afraid."

"For that you cannot be blamed," Fray Luis soothed; then because he knew it would bring relief, he urged: "Tell me."

The words tumbled from the lad's lips. The stage-coach in which he was traveling East had stopped at a relay station for a change of teams and lunch. Afterward he walked out into the desert a little way. Nobody had thought to warn him this was Apache country and that it was dangerous to wander alone even a hundred yards from a ranch, town, or indeed an Army post.

"Behind me something hissed through the air," the boy rushed on with his story. "It coiled tight around my arms."

"That was a lariat—a looped rope that they throw," Fray Luis said. "Go on."

"A hand over my face half smothered me. I couldn't yell. Somebody stuffed cloth in my mouth and pulled a sack over my head and dragged me away. When they took the sack off, I was in a dark place where not much sun came—the kind of a place where people are murdered. They tied me to something with spikes in it that stabbed into my back."

The boy shuddered and hurried on:

"Indians, they were. But not like ones I'd seen when we put into California ports. They had red bands around their heads and chests like those of great apes,

and their eyes were like a snake's. They stood off and shot arrows at me, but missed me. At first I thought they were poor shots. Then I knew they were seeing how close they could come before they really hit me. It was a game with them."

"Such is the way of the Apaches," Fray Luis said sadly.

"I knew they'd kill me, finally," the boy continued in a strangled voice. "They were leaping around like devils in that dark place. . . . Hell must be like that! The arrows thudded in closer, so close they cut my clothes and grazed my skin. I was afraid to die. I wanted to try to scream through the gag, but they'd seen me trying—and I couldn't let them see I was afraid."

"No, you could not." Fray Luis' supporting arm tightened proudly about the lad in the saddle.

"There was a picture I remembered—a picture of a man in olden times. He'd been bound with ropes as I was, and shot at with arrows. Many had pierced his body and wounded him desperately. He must have been dying. But there was a look on his face—a kind of shining look. I'd never understood that look before. Now I did. It was because he wasn't afraid—of pain, or death."

"No, he was not afraid," Fray Luis replied. "That man was Saint Sebastian. Not once but twice he faced martyrdom by the Romans, and suffered it with high courage."

"With high courage," the boy repeated. "I kept telling myself I must show them a look like his when the arrows hit me. The Indians were watching me with those snakelike eyes of theirs. They drew their bow-strings tight and took aim. I looked up over their heads at the sky and braced myself."

Swaying a little in the saddle, he sighed deeply. Clearly he was reliving the dreadful suspense of those moments of waiting for the arrows to strike. He straightened and went on:

"Nothing happened," he said and there was still a dazed wonder in his tone. "When I looked down, every Indian had disappeared. I heard two people coming, talking loudly in Spanish."

"That," said Fray Luis, "was I and my—I mean it was I, talking to myself. My name is Luis de Val."

The lad made his manners. "My name is Stephen Flint, sir, and I owe you my life. It must have been your coming that frightened the Indians away. I'm afraid I would not have died with courage like—like that Sebastian. I am not brave. I des—I left my ship in Monterey and came eastward because I was afraid of—of something. All my life I've been afraid of—"

"—Of being afraid," Fray Luis finished for him, looking up with his grave, kindly glance.

"Why, yes sir. I guess that's it in a way, but— Sorry, sir, I feel sort of queer and—" He slumped in a faint.

PROVERBIO CARRIED DOUBLE, the rest of the journey. Fray Luis held the lad, slight and not tall, astride the saddle in front of him. Yonder the peak of Santa Rita loomed over Tucson, and the white roof of the ruins of the mission of San Xavier del Bac, glowing in the light of the setting sun, was a beacon. The mule carried them on and into the narrow streets of a town still of the Spanish Southwest, though the Mexican War had made it American more than a score of years ago. Townsfolk stared curiously at the limp body the tall rider was supporting and called out questions.

"Apaches," Fray Luis answered and needed to say no more.

He halted Proverbio before a house with massive wall and windows protected by iron grillwork in the Spanish style. Vines climbed over the wall of an enclosed garden courtyard or patio. A servant opened the door as Fray Luis approached with his burden. . . .

Stephen Flint waked in a soft bed in a cool, high-ceilinged room. Whether he had slept a few or many

hours he did not know nor could he think where he was or how he had come there. He half opened his eyes. At one side of his bed a woman, stately and handsome, stood looking down at him compassionately. The boy's glance shifted, drawn to another figure at the other side. A girl was watching him. Her hair, raven black, was crowned by a high comb. Long lashes half veiled the dark lustrous eyes gazing down into his. A little nose, saucy and turned up a little and undeniably Irish, made her Spanish beauty all the more piquant. Her red lips parted in a slow, shy smile as she saw he was conscious. There was a radiance about her, he thought, such radiance as you imagined surrounded—

"Angels," he finished aloud.

"Did you hear that, Carmelita?" the older woman demanded. "He looked up at us and said 'Angels.' Plural—that includes your Aunt Teresa."

"Why, of course, Tia Teresa," the girl said smiling. "I shall certainly take good care of such a polite young man," announced Aunt Teresa.

"And so shall I," the girl added.

The boy was staring up at her with his heart in his eyes. He was far more awake than she had thought.

"Will you promise to?" he asked her.

The girl blushed vividly. Stephen thought she had started to say "yes," when her aunt answered for her.

"If such behavior takes place under the very nose of your aunt and *dueña*, Carmelita, and with the young man barely conscious—what," she demanded, "can be expected when you are on nurse duty alone and the young man is well on the way to recovery?"

The blushes suffusing the girl's faintly olive cheeks grew even rosier.

"Señor," Aunt Teresa addressed him with a direct look. "Certain customs, brought from Spain to Mexico and still followed in the United States by this family, for one, are strict and wisely so. They insist that a *novia*, a young girl like my niece here, shall not be left alone in the company of a dashing *caballero* like yourself. Her *dueña* must always be present.

"Consequently, señor, those angels you mentioned a while ago will attend you in pairs. If by chance one hovers over you singly, it will be only the old angel."

FRAY LUIS CAME TO SEE HIM. They sat in a shady corner of the patio and talked. Waving aside Stephen's reiteration of his gratitude, the older man said:

"As you have doubtless learned, you are in the home of my widowed kinsman, Eusebio Perez. His sister has been taking care of you, helped perhaps by his daughter Carmelita."

"But not often enough," the lad put in eagerly. Then his face clouded over and he said: "Señor, I must not impose on this hospitality further. Tomorrow I must travel on."

"You are going home?" the other man asked.

"No." The answer was short and unhappy. "I'm going East to find a job of some sort. I've been a ship's supercargo, but—but I don't like the sea."

Fray Luis was certain now that the boy had been running away from some fear. He said:

"Since you don't like the sea, would you care to take service with me here in the desert?"

Stephen's face lit up. "I'd like nothing so well!"

"Wait! I am the leader of one of the pack-trains which will take the field with American troops for a campaign against the Apaches."

The blue eyes looked haunted by the grim memory of the dark cañon. Fray Luis kept silence, watching the inward struggle. Finally the answer came:

"I accept, sir, and I'll do my best."

The eyes of Fray Luis glowed. "Good," he acclaimed. "Mules for the pack-trains are beginning to come into Camp Lowell now. Do you know anything about mules?"

"Only that they're stubborn and they kick, and I've always heard that they were contrary and full of tricks."

"There is much more to learn about them than that. We will teach you."

Fray Luis whistled; the mule Proverbio thrust through a door at the rear of the patio and sedately walked toward them. At the same moment the girl Carmelita entered from the house.

"Tio Luis," she greeted, "I heard you were here."

"My whistle," he said, "is more compelling than I thought. It was really the mule I called to ask a question. Proverbio, this young man believes that mules are given to contrariness and tricks. What do you say?"

"Master," the mule seemed to respond, "I shall answer with the ancient Spanish proverb which says: 'A mule and a woman do that which is expected of them.'"

CHAPTER FIVE



STEPHEN FLINT, recovered from his grim experience with the Apaches, watched the corals at Camp Lowell—the Army post outside Tucson—filling up as herds of mules were driven in. Strident braying echoed against the hills. Mostly brown or bay-brown, the rippling expanse of their backs looked, from the vantage-point of a top rail of the fence, like the loam of a new-plowed field. There were a few grays and sorrels but no pintos or spotted mules, considered to be less hardy than those with hides of solid color. From this herd the packmasters would make choices in turn for their several trains, until each reached his quota of sixty.

Long ears waved or were laid back with a snap, as heels were flung and missed or thudded against brown ribs. Now and again formidable white teeth were bared and nipped viciously at the flank of a crowding neighbor. Here were more mules than Stephen ever had seen in his life, or, he acknowledged to himself, had ever wanted to see. Why had he promised to serve with a train of these ugly ill-tempered beasts, when he might have joined the cavalry?

Of course, he would have had to lie about his age to enlist and it would not be playing square with Fray Luis who had saved his life. But there was dash and glamour to the cavalry. He had watched them drill and parade at "Retreat" and swing into the saddle and ride off on scouts after raiding Apaches. That was the way to go to war—mounted on a gallant charger!

"The knights of old," he declared aloud in his indignation, "never went into battle with a lot of mules."

"The deuce they didn't!"

A lieutenant of cavalry had ridden up behind his perch on the corral fence. There was a broad grin on the officer's keen face as he repeated: "The deuce they didn't. The knights rode horses, but their squires or someone usually was leading a mule carrying food and spare battle-axes. Same way still. Know what happens to a cavalry command in the field when it runs short of what little ammunition and rations each trooper can carry? It heads for home quick—unless there's a pack-train along. You a packer?"

"A very green one, sir."

"You'll learn. So will those green mules in there—the ones kicking up and acting skittish. See how their manes have been roached and their tails shaved so that there's nothing but a tassel of hair at the end? That's to distinguish them from the old-timer mules, so that you packers can take the shavetails in hand and teach 'em their place and their work."

"That's how we happen to call young lieutenants, fresh from West Point and spick-and-span and thinking they know it all, shavetails. They have to learn like those young mules. I know; I was one! Older officers, with

plenty of service behind them, are called 'bell-sharp.' They're like the experienced pack-mules that always follow the tinkle of the bell on the bell-mare, and know what to do and when to do it."

"That's interesting, sir. Just the same, I'd rather ride a horse than a mule."

"There's many a time when I wouldn't. On a mountain trail along a precipice when a single misstep means a thousand-foot drop, I'll take the surefooted mule. He's got more endurance and he eats less than the horse and he has too much sense to guzzle water when he's hot or to founder himself as a horse will by overeating. The mule's gait is smoother, too. I've got a saddle mule myself; her name's Malaria. I ride her whenever I can."

"Then why doesn't the cavalry ride mules instead of horses?"

"For one thing, mules won't learn drill. The mule will go ninety miles for you in a day and a night without water, but he sees no sense in wheeling and doing four's right and left, back and forth, and over and over again on a parade ground. It's his opinion it doesn't get him or anybody else anywhere. So he quits."

"For another thing, mules draw the line on headlong, breakneck charges on the enemy. They figure it's a silly way to get killed. So do I. Dismount, take cover and work around flanks—that's better cavalry tactics. But sometimes you do have to charge. . . . Don't think the mule lacks courage, though. He stands fire better than most horses, all recruits, and many a veteran soldier."

The Lieutenant drew breath and grinned. "I've talked your ear off," he apologized, "and I'm overdue at stables. By the way, General Crook rides a mule by choice. And packers serving with him don't miss any excitement! He takes 'em right along into the tight spots, the General does. Tell me, who's your packmaster?"

"Luis de Val, Lieutenant."

"The best of them all, a fine man, and my good friend. Please carry him Lieutenant Bourke's respects."

With a wave, the officer trotted off. Stephen Flint, his spirits far higher, climbed down from the fence and strode toward the packers' camp.

The encampment was orderly, for packers were classed by the Army as camp followers and hence were subject to regulations and to military discipline, though this was lighter for them than for troops. Most of the packers, American and Mexican, were dressed in a mixture of military and civilian clothing, and most carried revolvers and knives. Stephen himself was clad in a sombrero, a blue Army shirt, and fringed buckskin breeches. Slighter than the average husky packer, the spring in his step was a token of wiry strength. His face, though open and youthful, was marked by the maturity which comes with the bearing of responsibility.

That he would be relied upon to play his part in the coming campaign, he now realized. Fray Luis and all the pack-train were taking infinite pains with his instruction. For most of it, the mule Proverbio patiently served as a demonstration dummy.

THE BEARDED BLACKSMITH, TOBIAS, showed him how to lift an animal's foot and inspect for stones lodged in the hoof, and how to tighten a loosened shoe.

Said Tobias, suiting the action to the word:

'Stand close to him and lean yer weight against shoulder or haunch so's he's got to put his weight on t'other three legs. Then speak soothin', run yer hand down his leg gentle, and lift up the foot easy—like this. No, a mule can't kick ye in close this way. But watch out that some mean crittur, whilst ye have his foot in yer lap, don't reach his head around and bite ye in the behind.'

"Gosh! What do you do if he does?"

"Rap him in the snout with yer elbow and rebuke him."

"Just rebuke him? I thought you swore at mules!"

"Not in this train—not where Fray Luis can hear ye. He don't hold with it. Claims it aint needful. Never heard the like of that afore I started workin' fer him. but somehow we makes out, by G—, I mean, by Granny."

. . . Oh, *salud*, Fray Luis!"

The *patrón*, who had walked up quietly, was smiling. "As our good smith has said," he confirmed, "I do not believe it needful to say a devil's mass over mules. Thank you, Toby. Now I shall take the pupil."

He had Stephen groom Proverbio until the brown hide shone in the sun, explaining why such daily care was necessary for the animals while in man's service. If they were let run wild, they would keep themselves clean. He emphasized how sensitive ears must be brushed with utmost tenderness—how mules must often be allowed the delight of a roll on backs itching from hours under saddle or pack blankets. With stern insistence he taught that an *arriero* must always water and feed the mules in his charge before he looked to his own refreshment; that he must see to that duty personally and never assume it would be done by another.

"YOU KNOW THE PROVERB about that, Proverbio?" he asked the mule and made him answer by his ventriloquist trick:

"Yes, master. It is this: 'If two families keep a boat, it leaks. If two men keep a mule, it is thin.'"

Most difficult were the lessons given by Hank Colbin, the *cargador*. Again and again the lanky New Englander called Hank the Yank demonstrated and supervised the adjustment of *aparejo* and cargo on Proverbio's back and the process of making fast with the intricate diamond hitch. Stephen's sea-learned skill with ropes helped, but there were many arduous details to be mastered. Yet his task was lightened by his fascination for the running commentary furnished briskly and nasally by his mentor along with the instruction.

"Naow look here, Steve! You cah'n't jest slap on a *suadera*—that's Mex for sweat-cloth—any which way, like thet! Lay it on over his neck and slide it back, smoothin' back the hair, or your mewel'll git pack-sores, sure as shootin'. Not lookin' for a call-down by the General, be you? Waal, you let your mewel git pack-sores, and you'll be a-hearin' from him, and there'll be spahks a-flyin' off the Old Man's side-whiskers!

"Yes sircel! Packs hev to be right for General Crook. Sees to it personal, he does—sees that each mewel's *aparejo* is an in-di-vid-u-al fit. Mewels take it kindly of him. Kerry more cargo for him than anybody else."

"Tighten up that there latigo strap a mite, Steve. He's a-swellin' his belly. Naow it's a funny thing, but the General and our *patrón* knows more 'bout mewels than any men I ever knowed, and yet won't neither of 'em swear at 'em. Came right hard to me to I'arn not to. Never heerd of any other way of reasonin' with mewels. But Fray Luis he give me a book of nacheral hist'ry with names of a lot of queer critturs in it. Comes a time I need to speak serious to a mewel, I jest call him them names. F'r instance, if Proverbio here acts up when I'm a-throwin' a hitch on him, I up and yell at him: 'Stand still, you Talamanca jay, you blue-footed booby, you warthog, you hairy-rumped armadillo, you—you—'

Proverbio had turned his head and was regarding the *cargador* with an expression of hurt indignation.

"No offense, pardner. Jest a-practisin'," Hank assured him. "See, Steve," he pointed out to his pupil, "a mewel is an understandin' animule. . . . No, Steve, thet haint a diamond hitch you jest throwed! Looks more like a hooked rug. Try it ag'in. Waal, as I was a-sayin', a mewel is understandin' and he has feelin's, tender feelin's. Ever see how mewels act with a young colt? Crazy 'bout it, they be, and they'll be a-playin' with it all day if you let 'em. It's because they cah'n't hev childrun, so to speak, of their own. There's he-mewels and there's she-mewels,

but haint no use—the only way you kin git you a young mewel is breedin' a mare and a jackass.

"Kinda sad, I allus thought," Hank finished, looking melancholy. "Every time I come to think of it, I cal'late to go back to New Hampshire and marry thet girl thet's a-waitin' for me, and raise me a family. Then I up and fergit her till the next time mewels and colts reminds me of her."

Stephen grinned and asked: "How do you know she's still waiting for you, Hank? Maybe she isn't cherishing your memory any more constantly than you are hers."

Proverbio turned his head and spoke:

"As the proverb says, 'Memory, like woman, is wont to be unfaithful.'"

They had not seen Fray Luis walk up on the mule's off side. Before Hank could make a return sally, a trumpet down at the corrals sounded "Assembly."

"That's the signal for pack-trains to make their choice of mules," Fray Luis said. He turned to Hank and ordered, "Cargador, find all the men of my train and bring them to the corrals with lariats, headstalls and ropes. Stephen, saddle my mule; I shall ride down. Follow with the men."

As he rode up to the corrals, Luis de Val saw the packmasters of the other trains already gathered around Lieutenant Bourke, who would supervise the choosing. Three of the packmasters he knew, but the fourth—

He stared, not quite believing his eyes. It was the fat *patrón* from whom he had bought Proverbio! How, he wondered, could General Crook have assigned a train to such a man? High recommendations must be the answer. Undoubtedly he, Fray Luis, was prejudiced by that day in the cañon.

As he dismounted he heard Bourke greeting him warmly and saying, "You know all the other packmasters except perhaps Pablo Gomez here."

The stout one bowed ceremoniously and declared, "Señor de Val and I also have met."

As he spoke, he smiled. But Fray Luis did not miss the look of malevolence that gleamed for an instant in the little cunning eyes.

Through the reins looped over an arm he felt Proverbio grow suddenly rigid. His ears swung forward and back, and his tail lashed his flanks. By sight and smell mules can recognize men they have known, even after a fairly long interval—especially a man who has been their enemy.

CHAPTER SIX



VEN late choices would not be hard in this herd of fine American-bred mules. Quartermasters had known that General Crook would accept only the best and would not hesitate to slap an IC brand—"Inspected and Condemned"—on any animal with a defect. Three civilian pack-trains, organized by the General shortly after the Civil War for a campaign against northern Indians, had performed so excellently that the Government had purchased them for military service. These mules had been bought in the knowledge that they must pass muster with an expert.

"Gentlemen," Lieutenant Bourke addressed the packmasters, "I am informed that General Crook will soon move his headquarters here from Los Angeles. I warn you that you will not have much time to organize your trains before he takes the field. You who know of him need not be told what he expects of his pack-trains."

The packers, streaming over from their camp, ranged themselves around the fence. Stephen took his stand with Hank, Tobias, Chileno, and the rest of his train, proud of his fellowship with them. He heard Lieutenant Bourke ask the packmasters if they would draw lots for order of choice.

"Need we do that, Señor Teniente?" Pablo Gomez asked suavely. "These are all good animals. Let us choose by seniority. Since I am a newcomer to the American service, I am content to choose last."

"Wahn't thet perlite of him?" Hank the Yank remarked behind his hand. "Say, who might thet *hombre* be? Cahn't say I take to him much."

"A bad one," Chileno replied. "I knew him in Sonora. It was from him that our *patrón* bought that mule of his."

CHOOSING PROCEEDED RAPIDLY. The packmasters knew mules and knew their own minds. To Stephen's surprise, Fray Luis was picking a larger proportion of shavetails than the others. Hank, questioned, explained that the green mules would be more trouble at first, but once they were well-trained, more satisfactory. The bell-sharps would be set in their ways, and it would be hard to cure them of any bad habits they might have acquired.

As a packmaster indicated a choice, one of his men haltered the animal, led it out of the corral and tied it to the fence. Few had to be roped. When the allotment was complete, each packer in every train would have a string of five mules.

Stephen, sent in to get his first mule, a knowing-looking bell-sharp, put a headstall on him without difficulty, but when he grasped the rope to lead out, the animal refused to budge. He tugged, glaring reproachfully at the obstinate creature. It stood like a rock. The lad dug in his heels and pulled with all his might. He succeeded in accomplishing nothing but stretching the mule's neck. Persuasion was of no more avail than force. The balky beast only planted its spread forefeet more firmly and traded him stare for glare.

The watching packers were roaring with laughter. Stephen's face, red with exertion, grew redder still with embarrassment; futilely he kept on heaving and tugging.

At last out of the corner of an eye he saw Chileno coming to his rescue.

"Take it easily, friend Esteban," the veteran *arriero* told him. "When you wish to lead the mule, you must nevaire look at him and pull. As you have seen, he will not come. Some will say it is because he likes not your face. I think it is because the wise animal he refuses to be led by man who is walking backward and cannot see where he is going. Now turn, grasp the rope close under his jaw and lead, not looking."

Stephen obeyed. As if there had never been any difference of opinion between them, the mule strolled along amicably with him.

Now the choosing was nearing its end. Four of the packmasters made their final selection, completing their quota. That emptied the corral. Pablo Gomez, with last choice, was short a mule for his train.

"Sorry," Lieutenant Bourke apologized. "There's been a miscount. I was assured last night we had exactly the number of animals required. Should have checked. Señor Gomez, your shortage will be made up as soon as possible. May take time, though. There's not an unsigned Government mule left on the post."

"Your pardon, Señor Teniente, but there is," Gomez hastened to declare, "though known only to me and one other. It chances to be the mule Señor de Val rode here to the corral."

There was a moment of shocked silence. The calm, even tones of Fray Luis cut through it:

"This mule is my personal property, as—"

"—As none should know better than I, you were about to say," Gomez took him up; "—I, who sold him to you. That is correct. It goes without saying that a gentleman of your high repute bought the mule in good faith—in the same good faith in which I sold him to you. When I bought the mule, I had no suspicion of what I discovered only a few days ago. That mule was stolen from the United States Army."

"Your proof!" Bourke demanded shortly.

"I shall produce it. But first I confess my own fault. I did not properly investigate when I bought the mule from an *Americano* who I have learned was an Army deserter. The money loss is therefore rightly mine. Through you, Señor Teniente, I return to Señor de Val the price he paid me for the mule." He pushed a bag of clinking coins into the Lieutenant's hands. "And here is my proof," he continued, handing over a paper, "—a sworn deposition by the deserter who is now a prisoner in the post stockade."

"Not a great deal of reliance can be placed on the word of a deserter," Bourke objected. "If that's a Government mule, where's the U.S. brand on his flank?"

"Yes, where?" Stephen shouted and bit his tongue. He had not meant to burst out belligerently before everyone, and he only a tenderfoot.

Fray Luis dropped a silencing hand on his shoulder.

Pablo Gomez smiled a smile of patient tolerance for the impulsiveness of the young and immature. "The deserter," he said, "swears that he took the mule from a lot which had just come in and had not yet been branded."

"Waal, I want to know!" exclaimed Hank the Yank in a voice which combined mock admiration with downright disbelief. "Right smaht feller, wahn't he?" And the surrounding packers howled with glee.

The fat *patrón* shrugged, but his eyes reddened with anger. Then they gleamed with triumph as he snapped: "No, they had not yet branded that lot. But"—he paused and gazed about him to savor the effect—"they had burned in the hoofmarks."

Fray Luis broke his dignified silence. "There is no hoofmark on my mule," he said, and the glance he bent on Proverbio was full of affectionate concern. Gomez was quick with his reply.

"This once the ordinarily keen observation of Señor de Val has failed. There is a mark, though placed too high; it is so high that hair grown over it conceals it."

Bourke bent down over Proverbio's near forefoot and pushed back the hair fringe over the top of the hoof. "U.S. 201," he read. "Right! There it is."

The round countenance of Pablo Gomez fairly glistened with smug satisfaction.

"Since," he said, "this is a Government mule and I am short one and as it is my choice, I shall take him."

A hoarse growl rasped in the throats of Fray Luis' men. Only the authority of his outthrust hand stopped their forward surge toward Gomez and his men, who had surrounded him protectingly.

"Hold on!" came Bourke's commanding voice. "Fray Luis, nobody questions your good faith. I know you will understand that I have to ask if you investigated, as I know you usually do, before you bought this mule."

"In this case I did not."

"Forgive me if I must ask you why."

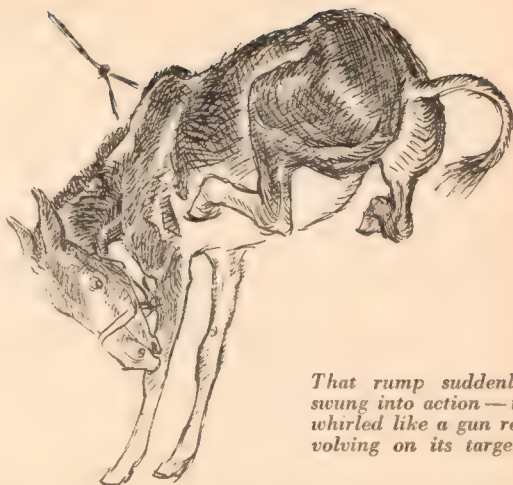
"There was no time. I bought the mule to save his life, Señor Gomez, who was annoyed with him. was about to shoot him."

Gomez spoke loudly above rising voices.

"Señor de Val, your reputation had led me to believe that you would never resort to a falsehood to defend yourself and keep property which is not rightfully yours."

STEPHEN WAS BURNING WITH RAGE. "That scoundrel called Fray Luis a liar and a thief," he told himself. "The grand old man will take it. He's above it. But I won't take it! I've taken a lot myself in times past, and lacked the nerve to do anything. But it's different when Fray Luis is called names like that. I'll jam those words back down that fat throat!"

He moved forward, shoulder to shoulder with Hank, Tobias, Chileno, and the rest of the train. Out came the Gomez men to meet them. Fists clenched and shoulders were hunched. Here and there hands stole down to revolver-butt or knife-hilt.



That rump suddenly swung into action—it whirled like a gun revolving on its target.

Bourke, Fray Luis, and the packmasters of the other trains pushed in between them. Reluctantly, the surly opposing lines drew back.

"That will be all of that," announced Lieutenant Bourke in an edged voice. "Any of you men who start a row later will land in the guardhouse . . . This matter will be investigated and settled by the General, when he arrives. In the meantime the mule will be held in my company's stables. Packmasters, have your mules moved to your lines."

CHAPTER SEVEN



PACK-TRAIN "A" heard from its *patrón*, Luis de Val, as soon as its mules had been picketed.

Leading back from the corral, its personnel had been fuming inwardly or audibly. Big Tobias was muttering in his beard about having missed a first-rate fracas. Chileno regretfully ran a calloused thumb along the razor-sharp edge of his knife. Stephen, shaking a little from reaction, still burned with resentment. Others applauded Hank's pungent observations on the parentage and personal characteristics of Pablo Gomez as the offspring of a long line of prominent polecats and rattlesnakes too ornery mean to rattle!

They fell silent under the stern glance of Fray Luis. First he thanked them for their loyalty, but that, he said, he had never doubted. It need not be nor should it under any circumstances again be demonstrated by ill-considered and undisciplined action. General Crook would rightfully place no confidence in a packmaster who allowed his men to brawl with another train. Let them guard his reputation by remembering that!

As the men, crestfallen, returned to the line, Fray Luis acknowledged to himself the glow of deep satisfaction their rally to his side had given him. He knew the hardened old-timers never shirked a fight, and he could have counted on them to the finish. But the spirit which had flared up in his behalf in Stephen, overcoming all timidity, had been especially heart-warming.

He wondered at the vengefulness of Gomez, so foreign to his own nature. The memories of that day in the cañon must have festered. Of course the man was taking a chance that the General's ruling would go against him, and he might even be dismissed from his post. Yet there was that hoofmark—Gomez probably knew of it right

along, although he could maintain that he never suspected its existence until informed of it by the deserter. Certainly he must have paid the deserter well for making that deposition. To what lengths would they not go, such men with distorted souls, to avenge a fancied wrong!

Fray Luis sighed. In any event, his good name would not suffer and all he could lose would be the mule.

All? Yes, but that was not a small loss, he was forced in honesty to admit to himself. A first-class lead mule was an important part of a pack-train. More, he had grown fond of the animal and Proverbio—so he believed—had grown fond of him. It would be a betrayal of trust and of affection to allow Proverbio to fall again into the cruel hands of Pablo Gomez.

Gravely troubled, Fray Luis watched the grooming of the mules. As it neared completion, Whitey the *cencero* rode along the line on Blanca, the white bell-mare. The mellow tones of the bell strapped around her neck sounded. Ears pricked up, nostrils flared, long heads swung around. This was Blanca's introduction to the mules of her train. Soon they would know her by sight, scent, and sound of her bell. Where she—small and sure-footed as they—led, they would follow.

STEPHEN MARVELED AT THAT phenomenon, a commonplace to veteran packers. Always and anywhere, mules would follow the bell-mare. *Madrina* she was called in Spanish—from *madre*, which means "mother." That was the key. To each mule the bell-mare was an embodiment, a living memory, of his mother, the mare that had borne, suckled and cared for him. Gladly he gave her allegiance and obedience, no matter how stubborn and recalcitrant he might be toward man. A white or gray bell-mare seemed to be the mules' favorite, but they would follow any mare. Once they knew the tones of the bell, these mules would separate themselves from a large herd to answer its summons. When they could not hear the bell on a march, they would bray piteously.

Blanca headed the column as the packers led the mules to water.

"Yep," said Hank, answering Stephen's questions, "she reminds these here mews of their maw. No, they won't pay no mind to a burro, 'ceptin' mebbe to take a kick at him. Haint proud of their pas, seems like. Kinda sad, I allus thought. Every time I come to think of it I cal'late I won't go back to New Hampshire and marry that girl after all. Fathers don't git much credit."

While the mules were being watered, Tobias came up. "See how these mules drink, Steve," he pointed out.

"They suck up water quick. That's 'cause they aint been driven in harness, and their mouths spread by bits. General Crook won't take no harness mules for pack. His trains've got to be able to drink on the go—while they're splashin' through a stream—and no time lost on a halt."

That night Whitey put forth his best efforts in cooking dinner for Pack-train "A." He knew Fray Luis was in low spirits because of Proverbio: that gloom had been cast on the whole train. He gave them delicious enchiladas, corn batter cakes dipped in a stew of red chili, with tomato, cheese, and onions chopped fine. He regaled them also with superior tamales, made not with one kind of meat alone but with three—beef, pork, and chicken—chopped, mixed with cornmeal and then rolled up in cornhusks and baked to a turn. As if his liberal use of chili and four varieties of pepper—red, white, green and black—had not been enough to warn the inner man, Whitey brought pots of boiling hot chocolate and coffee. Replete, the packers sat around their campfire.

Tobias, seeing Fray Luis' despondent look, spoke up: "Patrón, don't think I ever told ye the story 'bout the mule business up at Fort Laramie, did I? It wasn't long after the war and I was still soldierin'. There was a sergeant named Rocky in the same outfit as me. He was in charge of the mule corral.

"Well, it gits powerful cold up there. That winter come one of the coldest spells of weather I ever seen. Show ye how cold it was, it fruz to death one of the Government mules in the corral.

"Well, Sergeant Rocky he reports the e-vent to his commandin' officer. 'Sir,' sez he, 'last night one of the mules in the corral fruz to death.'

" 'It's cold weather,' sez the officer. 'Drag it out.'

"So Rocky he drug the dead mule out. But that night he drug it back into the corral and run off a live mule and tied him up on a private picket line of his own, off down in a gulch. Next morning he reports to the officer ag'in: 'Another mule died in the corral last night, sir.'

" 'Mighty cold weather,' sez the officer. 'Drag it out.'

"So Rocky drug it out and run off another live mule and drug the dead one back in and reported ag'in, and the officer give him the same order. Business was fine. Rocky figgered that if the cold spell lasted a bit longer the mules he had hid in that gulch would sell for enough money to live off'n handsome, the rest of his life.

"Well, after this goes on a while, the officer gits suspicious, like officers will. That night he wraps himself up in everything but the kitchen stove and goes down by the corral and watches from behind a tree. He sees Rocky drag in the same ol' fruz mule he'd drug out that mornin'.

"So next mornin' when Rocky comes in and reports another mule died in the night, the officer sez: 'Sergeant,' sez he, 'I recommend you freeze you another mule and not wear out that one pore ol' carcass, draggin' it out and in ag'in.'"

Cheered by his amusement at the blacksmith's story, Fray Luis had turned in and enjoyed a good night's sleep. But Bourke brought him bad news early in the morning.

"Forgive me, my friend," the Lieutenant pleaded. "Your mule is gone—gone from my own company picket line. My responsibility and my fault. He probably was insecurely tied, and broke loose."

"He was clever enough to untie his own tie-rope with his teeth," Fray Luis observed.

"There was a sentry on duty at the line to check on and prevent such things as that," Bourke said in a hard voice. "It will give you no satisfaction to know that I'm preferring charges against that sentry. Nor will my apologies do any good, sincere though you know them to be. My orderly is bringing my own saddle-mule to you. I beg that you will accept him as a gift. It is all I can do to atone—and still far too little. I know how fond you were of that mule of yours."

"You make too much of this, my friend," Fray Luis protested with his kindly smile. "Proverbio will be found, I am certain."

"I'm afraid not," Bourke answered sadly. "A party of Apache raiders sneaked in close last night. They ran off some cattle from Long's ranch, and on their way out they skirted camp. They never would have missed a mule wandering loose."

The Lieutenant said no more. He knew, and Fray Luis knew, the fate of a mule captured by Apaches.

CHAPTER EIGHT



OLDLY and bloodily the Apache raided and laid his ambushes, killing and plundering. Bleaching in the sagebrush lay the charred bones of men burned to death. More thickly clustered the white headboards in the graveyards of the forts and settlements of Arizona—headboards inscribed: "Met his death at the hands of Apaches," or "Tortured and killed by Apaches."

Stage-stationkeepers all along the southern route, and ranchers, stood to arms to beat off fierce attacks, but now

the savage enemy dared descend on Tucson itself. They drove off a herd of work-oxen and mules. Between the town and the Mission church of San Xavier they set on the mail-rider and slew him. The red tide swept over and engulfed a party of Mexicans on their way to Sonora, including a lovely young girl, Doña Trinidad Aguirre, who had been visiting relatives in Tucson.

Again the Army must strike, riding out to harry the Apache. Often he slipped away into the mountains, his trail cold. Sometimes he was cornered, and there were sharp brisk skirmishes where he took losses and inflicted them—there were empty saddles when the cavalry rode back. When the Army fought, it was man against man, which was not always so of the Apache's other foes. White settlers and Indians of other tribes had massacred Apache women and children with savagery equal to that of the enemy himself.

"Be ready," Fray Luis ordered his men. Perhaps a pack-train would be required if a detachment of troops from Camp Lowell were sent on an extended scout. But punitive expeditions by a few companies would, he knew, only prolong the struggle and make it more merciless. The end would never be until his friend General Crook was given the men and means for a conclusive campaign.

WHETHER ALL OR ONLY PART of it should be needed, Train "A" was ready. Every animal was newly shod, every article of rigging overhauled. Stephen Flint lingered at the picket-line, putting finishing touches on the grooming of the saddle-mule which had been assigned him. She was a sorrel, smaller than the average pack-mule but well able to carry his weight, gentle and easy-gaited. Fray Luis had told him she was probably a hinny, the offspring of a stallion and a female ass. Few hinnies were bred now. While more docile, they lacked the strength and ruggedness of mules with a jack sire and a mare dam. Stephen, grooming her, had brought her hide to a bright sheen when he felt someone watching him. He turned to face a tall whiskered man in a nondescript suit of canvas.

Stephen greeted him and he replied pleasantly. He was well-built and broad-shouldered and appeared to be interested in mules. He might make a packer. Some of the other trains were short a man or so. Pursuing the idea, the lad asked:

"Say, Mister, do you understand packing mules?"

"I think I do," the stranger answered.

"Had any experience in that line?"

"Well, considerable, here and there."

"Good," said Stephen, congratulating himself on his estimate. "This train—it's Fray Luis' and the best in the outfit—is already manned; but the other trains are pretty fair, 'cept I wouldn't recommend Gomez. Some of the other trains have a few vacancies. Try 'em, why don't you? You can get forty dollars a month and grub, packing on this campaign."

"I'm much obliged for the pointer," the tall man thanked him, "but I already have a job."

"Is that so? What kind of a job is it?"

There was a twinkle in the keen blue-gray eyes. "Well, my friend, I am at present commander of this Department. I am General Crook."

Stephen, brick-red in spite of his tan, gaped—wordless. The General spoke in crisp tones:

"Tell my friend Fray Luis I want five of his best mules packed with rations and ammunition and ready to move out on a scout with Bourke's company in two hours. Fray Luis can detail two packers and come along himself if he likes. I'm going."

"Fray Luis will like that, sir," Stephen managed to say. "His mule he was so fond of was probably run off by the raiders."

"I know," said the General. "Tell him he can bring you as one of the packers, if you want to come."

"You bet I do, sir!" Stephen exclaimed. Here was an opportunity for which he had longed. The murdered girl, Doña Trinidad, had been a friend of Carmelita, who had planned to return with her to Sonora and had postponed the visit only at the last moment. When he thought of the fate Carmelita had so nearly shared, a burning hatred for the Apaches almost choked him. His own grim experience with them had never aroused so fierce an emotion.

"I want to go a lot, General," he went on, "but I've got to be honest and tell you I'm still a pretty green packer."

"This scout will be good experience," Crook declared and smiled as he turned to stride off. "You were kind enough to try and help me get some, weren't you? One good turn deserves another!"

The trumpet which had sounded "Boots and Saddles" blew again. Bourke's company stood to horse on the parade-ground. "Mount," came Bourke's command, and the troopers, as one man, swung up and settled into their saddles. They formed fours from line and moved out. The small, lightly laden pack-train—it must travel as fast as the horsemen—swung in behind the column, Fray Luis leading, Stephen and Chileno Juan at flank and rear.

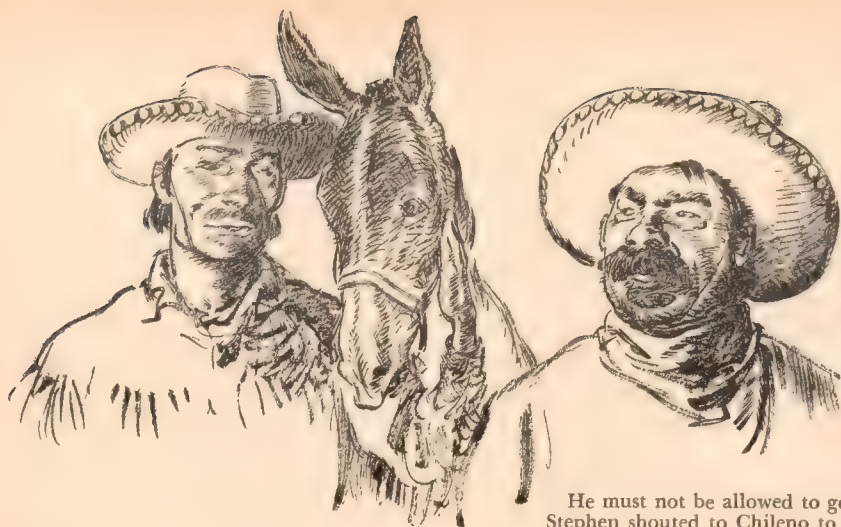
In the van rode Crook, still in his slouch hat and canvas suit. Stephen had learned he never wore uniform when he could avoid it. Except for the rifle in his saddleboot, his military carriage, and the fiercely jutting side-whiskers, he could easily be taken for a civilian, not the veteran officer he was, with a gallant record in the Civil War and in subsequent Indian campaigns. Bourke was fond of comparing him to Daniel Boone: Crook, he declared, had the same indifference to peril, the same genius for Indian-fighting, and equal skill with the rifle and in woodcraft. Certainly he was no swashbuckling soldier. He never swore, smoked nor drank any stimulant—not even coffee or tea. Yet he took—and delighted in—the gravest risks in hunting down grizzlies and brown bears, and cornering them for a close-quarters fight.

A strange figure, an Indian in Army uniform, came galloping up on a pony and ranged himself at Crook's side. To Stephen's questioning look over his shoulder, Chileno called, "Apache scout." This was one of the friendly tribesmen, ready to serve against other tribes of their own race for the sake of the chase.

"Now we shall have luck perhaps," Chileno called again. "There is a saying and a true one: 'It takes an Apache to catch an Apache.'"

HARD AND FAST THEY MARCHED. In the brief halts, the animals must be cared for, and saddles or packs adjusted. The pace began to tell on Stephen, for all the hinny's smooth gait. They did not make camp until late afternoon. When the mules had been unpacked, watered, fed and groomed, the lad, dazed with fatigue, rolled up in his blankets and slept like one dead. The column moved out again at two o'clock the next morning. Stephen was not awakened until it was time to mount and ride. Fray Luis had packed the mules with Chileno and performed all his other duties for him. Smiling, the *patrón* waved aside protests.

The trail wound through the hills and climbed into the Sierra Santa Catalina, and still there was no sign that they were overtaking the raiders, encumbered and slowed though they had been by work-oxen among the cattle they had run off. More and more steeply the trail climbed until every rider was bent well forward over his mount's neck. Some grasped manes to ease the backward thrust of their weight in the stirrups. It would not be well to have a saddle or a pack slip now! The trail had become only a narrow shelf along the mountain's flank; it barely offered clearance on the inward side for the cargo of the pack-mules. On the outward side, ground which had sloped off gently for a time now cut away abruptly in a precipice.



"This once the keen observation of Señor de Val has failed. There is a mark, though placed so high that hair grown over it conceals it," said Gomez.

"Don't look over the edge. Ride with loose reins and leave it to your mule." Stephen obeyed Fray Luis' advice, fighting down his dizziness and the sinking sensation in the pit of his stomach. His hinny picked her footing with unflinching precision. He was truly thankful, as Lieutenant Bourke had told him he would be, that he was not riding a horse, like the cavalry up ahead. Back of him he could hear Chileno actually humming a tune. This trail was nothing, of course, to an Andes muleteer. Stephen remembered the stirring story Chileno had told him of how General San Martin had led his army from Argentina through Andean passes to free Chile and Peru from the yoke of Spain, a feat which was made possible, so Chileno insisted, by a train of twelve thousand pack-mules. The trail through those awful heights had been as narrow as this, and icy besides. When a horse or mule slipped and slid over the edge, hurtling down into a yawning abyss, it screamed, Chileno declared, like a human being in mortal terror.

AT THAT INSTANT JUST SUCH A SCREAM broke through Stephen's thoughts, ringing in his ears. The mule immediately ahead of him had stepped on a stone, which had become dislodged from a crevice and rolled under a hind hoof. Scrambling desperately, the laden animal went over the precipice. Part way down it landed in the top of a projecting tree and lodged there for a full minute; then the branches broke and the poor beast dropped to the bottom, to lie crushed and still.

Stephen wrenched his eyes away. Fray Luis and Chileno were shouting at him. The column must move on. It would not do to be caught on this trail by the Apaches.

Fortunately there was not much more of that perilous path. Led by the scout, the column had swung off into a cañon under a looming peak. When the pack-train caught up, the cavalry had dismounted, deployed and gone ahead at the double, leaving mounts with the horse-holders. One carbine cracked, then another and another. The enemy had been overtaken at last.

Fray Luis swung out of his saddle. With long, swift steps he strode toward the firing. Stephen yelled at him vainly. Why was his chief blundering unarmed into the middle of a fight? His disregard of danger was habitual, but it could be stretched too far. So could also his belief that he who harmed no one would suffer no harm.

Suddenly Stephen realized that Fray Luis was going in search of his mule Proverbio.

He must not be allowed to go alone and unprotected! Stephen shouted to Chileno to watch the train and ran after the *patrón*, his heavy revolver swinging against his hip.

A bullet pinged over his head, and he dodged hastily behind a rock. There was no sign now of Fray Luis, but Stephen could see the cavalymen in skirmish-line closing in, firing steadily. He ran forward to another rock, drawing his revolver. Behind it lay a trooper, bandaging his wounded right hand.

"Howdy, packer," the soldier greeted. "We got a couple of 'em." He pointed beyond the rock, and Stephen saw the sprawled bodies of two Apaches.

On the right the volume of firing swelled, then died away.

"Reckon most of 'em got away by a side trail off there," the trooper said. "But there's some got cut off yonder. See? Up there on the cliff, where they got the cattle."

Stephen's gaze followed the soldier's pointing finger. Two Apache bowmen had taken cover behind a huge boulder and were launching one arrow after another. Behind them he sighted the dun hides of the work-oxen and a brown mule that looked familiar.

It was Proverbio. There was no doubt of it. That he still survived was extraordinary. Apaches seldom held captured mules, donkeys or horses long, but ate them, preferring their meat to that of cows, sheep or goats. They had slaughtered some of the oxen first only because they could not be driven as fast as the mules.

Hardly had Stephen identified Proverbio when he saw that a new target was being offered the Apaches in place of the troops at whom they had been shooting. The tall figure of Fray Luis was striding down toward them.

Stephen jumped up and ran. He yelled and banged away with his revolver, though he could hit nothing at that range. But he did achieve his purpose. The attention of the Apaches was distracted from Fray Luis and toward him.

Swish! An arrow whirled past him. He was close on them now. He could almost feel the baleful glare of their snaky eyes, remembered all too well from that day in the cañon. He saw copper-colored jaws, streaked with the blood of meat they had been feasting on, clenched with hate, the same hate that was fiery in his veins. Again a bow twanged. An arrow thudded into his left shoulder and at that close range its impact spun him around. He reeled and fell.

Pain streaked through him, but he struggled to his feet. One of the Indians, having shot his last arrow, was lowering himself over the edge of the cliff. Evidently a trail for escape led down its face. The second Apache,

his last arrow also expended, was gliding back to follow his companion, when the sight of Proverbio halted him. The white men could have back their oxen, which had been virtually driven to death on the mountain trail, but they would never recover this valuable mule! The Apache snatched up a lance from the ground, and poised it to plunge it deep in the mule's throat.

Fray Luis, running now, was still fifty feet away. So was Stephen, his revolver emptied. Proverbio, his head thrown back, his eyes rolling, strained from side to side at the rope tethering him to a mesquite. For a second the Apache delayed his thrust to move in closer.

Two hundred yards to the rear a tall man in a canvas suit leveled his rifle and fired.

The bullet took the Apache full in the chest. His lance flew out of his hand. He staggered toward the escape trail down the face of the cliff. As he reached it, his sturdy legs buckled. Clutching convulsively at the air, he toppled over the edge.

Together Fray Luis and Stephen reached the spot where the cattle were corraled. The exhausted oxen would have to be shot mercifully, but Proverbio was unharmed. His ears rose and he snorted when he recognized his master. Fray Luis flung an affectionate arm around his neck, but quickly turned with tender solicitude to Stephen when he saw the arrow embedded in the lad's shoulder. He was preparing to attend the wound when he looked up to see Crook, rifle still smoking, standing over him.

"Packmaster—and you, too, young man," the General said sternly, "your ideas on the tactics of Indian-fighting differ from mine. Hereafter mine will be followed."

"My fault, General. *Mea maxima culpa*," Fray Luis answered contritely. "I thought the savages would not see me, with your men keeping them occupied. All the blame is mine. Stephen here only rushed in when he saw I was drawing their fire."

The sidewhiskers still bristled fiercely.

"And all that risk," Crook condemned, "for a mule!"

He walked over and looked Proverbio up and down. The bushy brows unbent a trifle, and the sidewhiskers subsided slightly. His voice still brusque, he added:

"A certain amount of risk—but not rashness, mind you—is justified, for a first-rate mule."

CHAPTER NINE



HOUGH mules are not endowed, as are dogs, cats, and even horses, with means of conveying the softer emotions, Proverbio managed to express his joy at being once more with his beloved master by following him about everywhere. The tall *patrón* could not take a step without finding the mule at his heels. There was something both amusing and touching in the spectacle.

Fray Luis, his dignity unimpaired, made no effort to rid himself of his faithful follower. When he stopped and Proverbio nuzzled him, he stroked the mule's velvety nose. Never in all his years as a *patrón* had he owned a mule of which he was so fond or one which displayed such affection for him. But he kept reminding himself that his ownership was not proven. The vindictive Pablo Gomez could be expected to demand Proverbio at any moment. Not even the tact that he, Fray Luis, had recovered the animal and risked his life to do it could be expected to carry weight. General Crook would rule according to the evidence and not allow a personal bias to sway his decision.

He saw the General striding toward him now and went to meet him, Proverbio ambling contentedly behind.

"I've been looking for you, Luis," Crook said. "How is that wounded packer of yours, young Flint?"

"Recovering rapidly. General. He is being cared for at the home of a kinsman of mine in town where I took him after his first encounter with the Apaches. My kinsman's sister and his daughter Carmelita are Stephen's nurses."

"Carmelita is young Flint's sweetheart, I hear, and a very pretty girl."

Proverbio poked his long head over Fray Luis' shoulder and apparently remarked: "Sir, there is an old Spanish proverb which says, 'There is no ugly sweetheart.'"

Crook laughed. "Luis, you are a gifted ventriloquist, but it is another talent of yours I'm going to call on. I'm going to ask you to take on a difficult and possibly a dangerous detail. I want to send you as a one-man expedition against the Hopi Indians."

"But I had not heard the Hopis were hostile, General."

"They aren't actually on the warpath, but they're the next thing to it. The Hopis are selling arms and ammunition to the Apaches."

"Ah! And where do the Hopis get them?"

GENERAL CROOK'S SIDEWISKERS bristled as he admitted: "From, I regret to say, white traders up in Utah. They're out of my Department and out of my reach. Yes, I know my country should be ashamed to send its soldiers to fight and die while it lets its citizens trade arms to the enemy; I say so in my official reports and make it strong! Meanwhile I must do the best I can to shut off this Hopi source."

"Luis, I can send you or I can send a couple of battalions. I can't spare two battalions and it's not easy for me to spare my best packmaster either. But you have a way with Indians. I depend on you to save me serious trouble with the Hopis when I already have my hands full with Apaches."

Fray Luis bowed gravely. "I'll go, of course," he answered. "It was the Order of the Friars Minor, the Franciscans, to whom I once had the honor of belonging as a lay brother, that converted the Hopis, years ago and taught them to become herders and to plant fruit trees. Long since they lapsed from the faith; but some tradition of gratitude may still linger."

Said Crook: "You probably will want to ride this mule of yours, and you shall. Yes, I know there is some unfinished business on that score which must be cleared up with Packmaster Gomez. That will have to wait."

The General broke off to eye Proverbio keenly. "Luis," he said, "you may have to put words in the mouth of this mule of yours, but I'd be almost ready to swear he can understand on his own. Did you notice his expression when I told you that you could take him?"

"Yes," Fray Luis replied, smiling. "I know he often does understand, somehow. I never held with these words of the Psalmist, though they are in the Scriptures: 'Be ye not as the horse or the mule who have no understanding.' Animals understand far more than people think they do."

"You'll be riding through bad Apache country. Tell the adjutant I said to give you whatever escort you need. . . . The best of luck to you. Luis—and be careful!"

General Crook clasped his friend's hand, then swung off toward Headquarters.

That night Fray Luis rode off on Proverbio, unaccompanied. "Whatever escort you need," the General had said. Well, he needed none. Both because of his custom and the nature of this task he traveled alone. . . .

Fray Luis rode alone through the desert. Centuries before, Franciscan friars had ridden or trudged these trails, as solitary as he or with a single Indian guide. They too had gone unarmed, their only weapon the Cross. Not a few of them had fallen victim to lance or arrow, their life's blood soaking into these very sands. But others had lived to carry the word of God to the Indians, to build their mission churches and plant orchards and gather herds to win them to a new way of life.

But never, from those days to the present, had the Apaches listened—and they had taken vengeance on all who had. Arizona and New Mexico were dotted with the ruins of missions and crumbled pueblos which the implacable Apache had made first dwellings of fear, then heaps of stone. Yet Fray Luis never had either hated or dreaded the fierce warriors whom other tribes called Apache—"the enemy"—but who called themselves Tinde—"the people." He still believed, as he always had, that they could be led from war into the paths of peace and civilization. But first they must be chastened, first they must meet defeat.

NOW THEY WERE FAR FROM CHASTENED! Fray Luis, on the second day of his journey, beheld a grim record of savage defiance. Ahead on the trail loomed the bulk of a Concord coach turned on its side, the horses dead in their traces. As he approached, a rescue-party of ranchers and miners was galloping up. But they had come hours late. The gayly painted panels of the stagecoach were splintered by bullets and studded with arrows, the upholstery blood-soaked. In it and around it, among letters scattered from the slit-open mail pouches, lay four passengers and the driver, dead and scalped.

From a distance came faint calls. The rescuers found two survivors, a man and a woman. Each wounded in one arm, they had fought off the Apaches with the man's revolver, she helping load, he firing. Though they had repulsed the savages, they now were perishing from thirst. With a broken knife-blade the man had been hacking at a barrel cactus in a feeble attempt to tap its water.

Saddened, Fray Luis rode on. The episode should have heightened his sense of his own peril, but it failed to do so. That night he made camp, watered Proverbio sparingly from his water-skin, fed and groomed him, ate his own supper, wrapped himself in a blanket and lay down to sleep, secure in his simple faith that he would be watched over.

So indeed he was. Proverbio, hearing a strange noise about midnight, left his sleeping master to investigate. Trusted not to stray, he was never hobbled. Out there in the desert was some strange, menacing presence; the mule had both heard and smelled it.

Fray Luis started up, wakened by weird noises—snorting, grunting, stamping. By the light of a crescent moon he discerned his mule confronting a large, grotesquely shaped beast whose like he never had seen. Not for some moments was he able to identify it from his memory of pictures. It was a camel.

A camel in the American desert? Now he remembered: He had heard of some being imported.

That was true. Some years before Congress had appropriated thirty thousand dollars for the purchase of camels in Egypt and Asia as military transport animals and brought seventy-six to the Southwest. Later forty-five had been imported from Siberia for mail and express routes. In both cases, the experiment had been abandoned. Some camels, however, had escaped and were roaming wild through Arizona, and this was one of them.

Mule and camel, man's ancient burden-bearers, stood and watched each other warily and belligerently. Again Proverbio snorted, and the camel grunted. Obviously insulting remarks were being traded, for suddenly Proverbio bared his teeth and snapped. Evading easily, the camel took the offensive. His long snaky neck darted out; yellowed teeth bit a neat chunk out of his opponent's shoulder.

Proverbio brayed his battle-cry. The two struck viciously at each other with their forelegs. Neither landed. The camel bit again and barely missed amputating a long ear. The ship of the desert then determined to bring his armament aft into action; with either long hindleg a camel can deliver a kick like the blow of a pile-driver. But this was a fatal error! His maneuver

brought into play his foe's most formidable weapons. Proverbio, more agile, whirled too—and whirled faster. Like lightning he flung out his heels. A resounding thud on the camel's ribs was echoed by a grunt, and squeals. The foreigner turned and fled, with Proverbio in hot pursuit nipping at his hindquarters.

Fray Luis smothered his laughter to whistle the mule back. Patting the faithful animal, he dressed the mule's wound and returned to his blanket.

His story of the encounter, told in camp on his return, became a favorite of his *cargador* Hank the Yank, who embroidered on it at every retelling. In time, he arrived at the following free version:

"Haint never told you 'bout the fiercest fight between animules I ever seen, hev I? Waal, it happened on the Arizony desert when me and my chief was out a-roundin' up a hull tribe of Hopi Indians. This fight was 'twixt our best mewel and a cam-u-el. Sure, Arizony in them days was full of cam-u-els, and along with 'em was A-rabs and Gypshuns and sech people, come over to tend 'em.

"Waal, it came to a p'int when it had to be settled which was a-goin' to be the reg'lar pack-animule in them parts—the mewel or the cam-u-el. And more'n thet: Was it a-goin' to be Arizony for the A-rabs, or Arizony for Americans? So we stages this fight 'twixt our best mewel named Proverbio and a cam-u-el called Fatimer or somethin'."

Hank's account stretched the fight into a battle of at least twenty rounds, in which, he claimed, Proverbio had ten inches bitten off each ear but came back to kick the deck off the ship of the desert and win humps down.

"And thet," Hank would finish, "is why Arizony is still American and you fellers haint a-workin' for A-rabs and Gypshuns, a-buildin' pyramids!"

FRAY LUIS RODE ON. Pack-trips had taken him into this region before, and it had never ceased to fill him with wonder and utmost awe. Here was encompassed both incredible beauty and stark desolation. This was the land where mighty cañons cleft the earth, and torrents rushed through their abysmal depths to the sea. Here were glimpses of purgatory and likewise of heaven and hell.

He rode through fallen forests, their ancient trees turned to stone. He rode over sands which gleamed yellow and red, magenta and mauve, and as he gazed, merged under the shifting light into blue and amethyst and saffron, and again into russet and lilac. Well was this called the Painted Desert!

Yonder, blood-red sandstone against the brilliant sky, rose a broad-topped mesa. Upon it stood the pueblos he was seeking, the villages of the Hopis.

Proverbio carried his master through acres of peach orchards and past flocks of pastured sheep and goats. These, as Fray Luis had told General Crook, were blessings bestowed on the Hopis by the Franciscans when they had converted them, more than three centuries before. Yet he doubted that any grateful memory would linger, fulfilling the hope he had expressed. From his reading of the annals of the Order he knew that in 1680—this he had not told the General—the Hopis had risen in bloody rebellion. They had burned their missions and slaughtered twenty-one of the Franciscan fathers who were ministering to them.

Resolutely Fray Luis, in the tradition of courage of the Franciscan Order, rode into the village of Hualpi and demanded audience with the chief.

In the shadow of a ruined stone wall, which was the remnant of a mission church, the chief received his visitor. They spoke in the Apache tongue. The Indian was surly and his heavy brows were bent in a frown, as if he suspected the errand on which this white man had come. The sub-chiefs gathered about him were distinctly hostile.

Stately and impressive in his role of ambassador, Fray Luis spoke. He spoke of the flocks and orchards, boons conferred on the Hopis by the white men. Now, he declared, evil was being returned for good. The Hopis were buying rifles and ammunition and reselling them to the Apaches.

"He who arms our enemies joins them," the speaker finished.

The chief sneered. The Hopi people, he said, did not fear threats. Nor did they fear white soldiers, so often beaten by the Apaches. Only words of wind were spoken by this man who claimed to come from a great white chieftain—this man with the look of a priest, but who had no proof that the Hopis were selling arms.

"My words are true words and there is proof of them," Fray Luis said sternly. "That you buy your weapons from white men will not save you. Those white men are traitors and renegades. I must carry back your word that you and all your tribesmen will cease arming the Apaches."

For a moment the chief's defiance seemed shaken. Then a gleam of cunning and ferocity glinted in his eyes.

"You will have your answer at the ceremonial and council this evening," he promised.

THE SUN WAS LOW in the western sky as the Hopis thronged out of their pueblos and formed a wide oval. At one end the chief had stationed himself. Fray Luis had been placed to his right, but several yards apart so that he stood isolated within the encircling ring. Harshly the chief flung words at him:

"You who come from the bluecoat soldiers to accuse us are about to witness a ceremony few white men have seen. You shall behold the messengers we send to our gods with prayers for rain, prayers which never go unanswered. When you have seen, you will know that the hearts of the Hopis are as the hearts of lions, and they fear nothing. Then you may have our answer—if you still want it."

Drums throbbed in a curiously accented rhythm. Fray Luis heard a whisper run through the crowd: "They come! The priests of the Snake Clan!" Filing into the oval at the farther end there approached a line of men naked except for blue kilts with cabalistic markings. They chanted as they came, bent over in a crouching dance. Their faces were painted jet black except for their foreheads—which were smeared with a white pigment, as were their forearms and lower legs. Repulsively ugly, ghostly in the slowly fading light, they danced on. Rattles, bound to their knees, whirled and clicked ominously.

Now the line had circled a pit. Every third priest stepped forward and stooped. As they turned and faced the throng, Fray Luis felt his blood run cold. Each priest held clenched in his teeth a squirming rattlesnake!

The dancing file advanced. So purposefully that they must have been following special instructions, the priests moved to pass close to Fray Luis. As they came, he could plainly see the rattlers gripped in their mouths: great diamond-backs and smaller but even more deadly sidewinders. Shuddering with mankind's ancient repulsion for the serpent, he braced himself and stood erect with arms folded. The priests drew close, and the snakes they held darted fearsome triangular heads, with hissing forked tongues protruding, toward the tall white man who stood alone. But the watchful chief could discern no tremor on the impassive face of his guest.

Louder throbbed the drums. Some of the priests spat out their burdens. Rattles slithered across the sands. Here and there one coiled to strike, but priests with snake-whips—sticks with feathers bound on the end—drove them into flight.

"Now go our messengers to the Snake goddess who bore them, carrying our prayers for rain," said the chief. His

voice was disgruntled; clearly, he was disappointed that he had not broken the nerve of this envoy. He spoke on angrily: "Go back to the white chieftain whose messenger you are. Tell him that the Hopis, who dare hold rattlesnakes in their mouths, will trade as they please."

Fray Luis stood forth alone and spoke in a loud and terrible voice.

"You Hopi people, who dwell in peace and prosperity, beware. Beware lest in your folly you share the fate of the serpent you worship, the fate to which he was doomed by One you have forgotten—the One who laid this curse on the serpent: '*Because thou hast done this, thou art cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field. Upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life!*'"

The throng, swaying a little, stood in awed silence. Fray Luis suddenly broke it with a piercing whistle.

Not a minute had passed before there was a commotion among the Indians at one side of the oval, and a mule, ready-saddled, shouldered his way through.

Once in, Proverbio halted, ears forward and twitching. He smelled the crawling death in this place. He had been long enough in the desert to know rattlesnakes well. He had seen mules bitten by them die slowly and unpleasantly. But his master had called him. Stepping gingerly but without hesitation, the brave animal came on until he reached the man's side.

Fray Luis, proudly laying a hand on his mount's neck, faced the Hopis once more. But to the astounded Indians it was the mule that spoke:

"Woe to the Hopis! They that sell arms shall perish by them!"

General Crook's envoy mounted and rode off, with none standing in his way.

CHAPTER TEN



ROOK listened to the factual, self-effacing report made by Fray Luis and sensed beyond the words the ordeal of the Snake Dance. He could well recognize courage, for in the Civil War he had received repeated brevets for gallantry in action, until he held the brevet rank of major general, though his actual rank was that of lieutenant colonel. But Crook, after praising his emissary for the bold front which would at least slow down arms-selling by the Hopis until they could be dealt with, also delivered a lecture on the risk run by traveling alone through Apache country.

Fray Luis heard him out and when he had finished remained silent, regarding Crook with a grave, quizzical smile. The General began to fidget. Bourke or someone, he sensed, had been describing his own practice of taking a mule, a frying-pan, a bag of salt and one of sugar, a rifle and a shotgun, and sallying out by himself. It was not only to indulge his passion for hunting and fishing but to scout territory through which he would campaign and to learn the haunts and habits of the hostiles. Justifying his own action, Crook was hardly in a position to censure one of his men who had also chosen to play a lone hand as the best way to accomplish a task.

"Well, never mind this time," he almost blustered, "but no more of that, Packmaster! Now, Luis, we'll have to get on with something I'd like to settle myself and have done with—the matter of that mule of yours. After the way he behaved before the Hopis, I'm even more reluctant to expose you to the risk of losing him. But it can't be helped."

"I understand your position, General. Gomez for some reason has made an issue of the affair."

The General tugged at his beard. "Yes, and he has evidence that can't be disregarded. Queer thing, that

hoofmark! But there it is and an affidavit to boot, though it is a deserter's.

"I can't make an arbitrary decision between two of my packmasters," he continued. "Fact is, I'm not going to make any decision at all except, being the Department Commander, as the reviewing authority. This case is going before a board of investigation. I've appointed three officers to it: Majors Brown and Randall and Captain Henry. Perhaps you have an idea why I've done that."

"I think I have," Fray Luis responded. "I have heard the talk in Tucson. Evidently every step you take in this case is being watched by the Indian Ring for some reason of its own."

Crook nodded somberly.

Grafters, gunmen, rustlers, fugitives from the California Vigilantes, all manner of riffraff—of such was the Indian Ring. They infested Arizona Territory like the vermin they were. These scoundrels thought only of lining their own pockets, and it concerned them not at all that the money was stained with blood. They stirred up the Apaches to warfare, then demanded that the Army kill them off—and cared not how many soldiers' lives it cost. At every turn, crooked politicians and contractors cheated the Government on Army supplies. Whenever an Apache tribe gave promise of settling down and becoming self-supporting, the Ring pulled wires to confiscate crops or to move the Indians to a barren Reservation. The Ring did its utmost to keep the Indians fighting or to keep them paupers. Either way the Ring won, with its graft on supplies for the Army or the Indian agencies.

General Crook's expression was grim as he declared: "That gang I'll have to fight as hard as I do the Apaches. The Ring is powerful and not only in Arizona. Its trail of corruption runs all the way to Washington. I can't afford to give them any excuse to undermine me. That's why I'm running a three-officer board on a mule."

Fray Luis had listened, sunk in melancholy silence. Should he offer to relinquish Proverbio to Gomez out of loyalty to his friend General Crook and to the cause he served? How could loyalty to a faithful animal compare? Could he consider the cruel treatment that would surely be the mule's lot if he fell again into the hands of the fat *patrón* who once had owned him?

Crook seemed to have been reading his thoughts. The bushy whiskers flared, and he burst out:

"There will be no withdrawal by any party in this case! It will be decided once and for all by the board. Then perhaps I shall have to ask a sacrifice by an old friend. If the decision goes against him, I shall ask that he and his pack-train abide by it and do nothing to disturb the smooth functioning of my command in the campaign ahead." The General paused a moment and finished: "But I know I shall not even have to ask."

ARM IN A SLING, STEPHEN FLINT strolled out into the pleasant *patio* of the house of Señor Perez. His wound was healed, and tomorrow he would return to duty. How kind they had been to him here! He must begin to say his thanks and adieux. Perhaps he might find Carmelita here in the garden.

The girl was seated on a bench under a shade tree. Sunbeams filtered through its branches to glisten on the black hair, drawn back so severely to the high comb but escaping in tiny curls at the temples and the nape of her neck. Her brown eyes invited him, and he hurried toward her.

A rustling as of a ship under full sail sounded behind him. Without looking, Stephen knew that as usual when he hoped to see Carmelita alone her Aunt Teresa would, invariably and inevitably, be among those present. She was the perfect *dueña*; she never failed.

Stephen, smothering vexation, stepped aside and bowed to both ladies.

"I was looking for you both; to thank you for all you've done for me," he announced.

Tia Teresa smiled graciously. "I thought you might be, so I came out here," she said. "I thought I would save you thanking each one of us separately. Now you won't have to say the same thing twice, once to Carmelita and again to me. It would have been the same thing, wouldn't it?" she demanded, her eyes twinkling.

"Of course." Stephen could not help grinning. The old dragon was not a bad sort, really; she only did her duty as she saw it. But he did wish that he might talk to Carmelita alone just once!

"Señora and señorita," he began, but Tia Teresa, who had taken a seat some distance away, was obviously not listening. Furthermore, she had turned her deaf ear toward them. He flashed a grateful look toward her.

"Carmelita," he said.

"Esteban," she answered softly. His name in Spanish sounded wonderful, thought Stephen, when she spoke it.

Somehow they soon reached the subject of love, but they talked of it only in general terms. They discussed it in a highly detached manner, using the third person. From the words they used they might have been referring to any other two people. Certainly the sentiments they were expressing—staring away from each other at the *patio* wall—had nothing at all to do with Carmelita or Stephen. Or did they? Each caught the other stealing a sidelong glance to see, and both blushed a fiery red.

TIA TERESA MUST HAVE SENSED the atmosphere was becoming supercharged, for she stirred restlessly. Hastily they changed the subject. Carmelita begged him to tell her of his life at sea. He commenced to tell her of strange ports he had visited, but broke off to finish lamely. Fear returned to haunt him, the fear he had been running away from when he came to Arizona. He could not forget. He could not blot it out now by reminding himself that twice he had stood up to the Apaches and acquitted himself creditably. Carmelita was proud of him for that. No longer would she be, he was sure, if she knew of his craven behavior on his last voyage.

Perhaps he might be able to redeem himself, and some day Carmelita might understand. But now the magic of this sunlit afternoon was gone. Stephen was not sorry when the *dueña* rose and motioned her charge to follow her indoors. Hurt, not comprehending his sudden change of mood, the girl left him without a word.

Stephen disconsolately wandered to the farther end of the *patio*. On either side of a barred door small windows gave out on a rear street. Through them a voice was wafted, distinct though low-pitched. He recognized those suave, guttural tones: That was Pablo Gomez.

Stephen listened without hesitation to the earnest conversation in which the man who had tried to take Proverbio was engaged with several others, for it might be possible to pick up some information on the fellow's schemes, useful to Fray Luis. But the eavesdropper could not understand a single word being said. They were not speaking Spanish but some strange tongue he never had heard.

Yet there was one word being repeatedly used. Stephen noticed it carefully, until he had memorized its sound. It might serve as some sort of a clew. *Chaundezi*. That was it.

He told Fray Luis about it next day when he reported back for duty. His chief looked worried.

"I wish you could have seen the faces of the men with Gomez," he said. "I strongly suspect they were members of the Indian Ring and I wish I could prove the connection of Gomez with the Ring."

"But what language were they using?" Stephen asked.

"One fairly safe to use in case anyone should overhear. The Apache tongue."

"Apache! Say! But what does that word mean?"

"Chaundezi means literally 'long ear' and it's the Apache word for mule."

"Say! There's only one mule they could have meant—Proverbio!"

"You are right, Stephen." The jaw of Fray Luis was set. "Gomez will do his best to get Proverbio away from me, when the board hears the case. And I am afraid he has every chance of succeeding."

CHAPTER ELEVEN



N and around the stone-and-adobe building which was camp headquarters, there hummed even more than the usual activity. The board of officers, appointed to determine the ownership of the mule Proverbio, was sitting this morning.

Lieutenant John Bourke, a witness, arrived early. He would testify on the events that occurred when the claim was first made in the course of the allotment of the new draft of mules to the several pack-trains. Testimony on that phase would also be given by the two packmasters concerned, De Val and Gomez. But no packer of either train would be present, in accordance with strict orders from General Crook. Bourke, remembering how narrowly a bloody clash between the two outfits had been averted, highly approved his chief's precaution.

He watched another witness marched up by an armed guard—the deserter who had sworn he had stolen Proverbio from the Army and sold him to Gomez. That soldier, thought Bourke, looked untrustworthy; he had a hangdog air and a shifty eye.

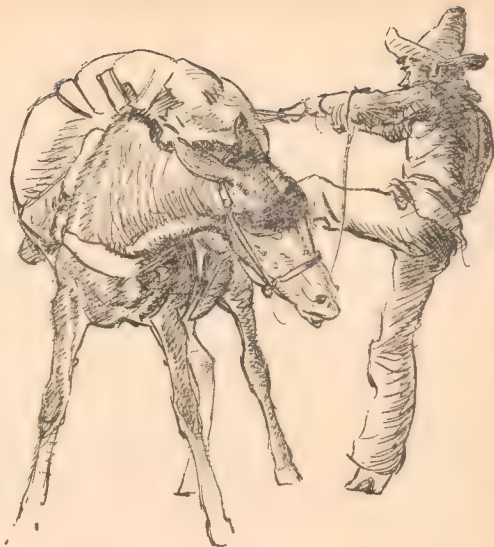
The fact that he was a deserter did not necessarily damn him. As the Lieutenant well knew, not a few good men "went over the hill" because they could not endure the terrific hardships of the Indian campaigns and the monotony of garrison duty. For sixteen dollars a month and food and shelter—such as they were—a soldier risked death, crippling wounds, and torture to serve a country which could hardly be described as grateful. If he deserted, "patriotic" citizens would buy his mount, rifle, and equipment for from one hundred fifty dollars to three hundred dollars in preference to turning him in for the Government's twenty-dollar reward. Were he caught, like this fellow, he faced a "bobtail" or dishonorable discharge and a dread ordeal—half his head shaven, the buttons and insignia cut from his uniform, he would be paraded before the garrison and drummed out of the Army, with fifes wailing the "Rogue's March":

*Poor old soldier,
Poor old soldier,
Tarred and feathered and sent to hell
Because he wouldn't soldier well.*

Bourke shuddered inwardly as he always did when he witnessed the scene. He doubted, however, that this deserter was the type of man to mind such disgrace—particularly if, as Bourke strongly suspected, he could count on a tidy little sum of money from Gomez in payment for his deposition as to the mule.

Fray Luis approached. His smile of greeting to Bourke showed a trace of sad resignation which he masked as he entered. Next came Gomez. There was about him, reflected Bourke as he nodded, none of the air of good humor or jollity so often seen in stout men. In Gomez there was rather something unhealthily sinister; he reminded the officer of a fat tarantula.

Close behind Gomez but, ostentatiously apart from him and not appearing to know him, followed three citizens of Tucson. Bourke, recognizing them, decided to report their presence as soon as possible to General Crook. Two of them were contractors dealing in Army supplies and the third a town politician who acted as a corre-



spondent for several newspapers in the East. Bourke was virtually certain that all three were members of the Indian Ring. Hailing him with unwelcome familiarity, the men asked if the hearing were public. Bourke told them coldly that it was. It might make a good story, the newspaper correspondent sneered—the Army taking time for a lot of to-do about a mule while an overdue campaign against the Apaches waited.

Lieutenant Bourke, stifling his anger, was about to follow the civilians into the building when he saw another party arriving. A soldier from the quartermaster corral was leading up Proverbio to be held in readiness outside Headquarters. Seeming to sense his importance to this occasion, the mule stepped along jauntily. He was "Exhibit A"—he was the bone of contention.

Grinning, Bourke paused to stroke Proverbio's neck.

"All right old fellow you're it right now," he said. "But if the decision in the case goes the wrong way, you're not going to be feeling so uppity—not when friend Gomez gets his hands on you again."

With crisp expedition the three officers of the board swore the witnesses and took their testimony. From the very beginning of the hearing the atmosphere was electric. Fray Luis, in telling how he had acquired the mule, did not hesitate to present a highly unflattering picture of the actions of Gomez that day in the cañon. Gone was any reticence in sparing the reputation of a fellow packmaster. Fray Luis was far too resentful of the designs of Gomez on Proverbio to withhold anything. His words were all the more effective for the calm dignity with which he spoke them. Gomez frowned and squirmed in his seat. Only the visitors from Tucson seemed to feel any sympathy for him. The rest of the audience—Army wives, the chaplain, and the surgeon—frankly delighted in his discomfiture.

Gomez, taking his turn, lashed back, but did not make the mistake of losing his temper. All injured indignation, he suavely denied most of Fray Luis' statements without ever directly giving him the lie. He emphasized his own innocence in buying the mule from the deserter. Finally he declared that he never would have sold the mule if Fray Luis had not persuaded him to sell by taking advantage of a spell of bad behavior by the animal. Deprecatingly Gomez ended: "I should, of course, have known better—but I was annoyed, as who is not at times by a mule?"

The Tucson men, who had begun to applaud, were sharply reprimanded and silenced by Major Brown.

That officer then read a statement by the Commanding Officer of Camp Apache, from which post several desertions had occurred, including that of the present prisoner, at about the time a number of new mules had been run off. It was not known whether deserters or Indians were responsible for the theft. The mules had not been branded. Since the post blacksmith had left the service, it could not be determined whether he had marked their hoofs—if so, it was asserted, the marks had not been registered.

ALL THE EVIDENCE WAS TYING IN neatly with the claims made by Gomez. But when the deserter took the stand, Major Randall quickly flung a penetrating question at him: Why had he been willing to confess that he stole and sold a Government mule?

"Well, sir," the man answered promptly, "I was out on a fatigue detail on the post here and I run right into Señor Gomez. Course I recognized him as the Mex—as the Mexican gent—I sold the mule to. My guard told me he was an Army packmaster now. So I figured I'd better own up before he reported me. If I did, and you got the mule back, there's that much less ag'in' me when I go up for trial for goin' over the hill."

There was no hole in the case there, Fray Luis mused in deep discouragement. If there had been a hole, they had plugged it up, and the deserter had been glibly ready for that question.

Lieutenant Bourke testified that Packmaster Gomez had been next in order for a choice when the allotment of mules had been made to the several pack-trains, and that he was still short one of his quota. If the animal in question in this case was determined to be a Government mule, it would go to Gomez in accordance with the conditions of the allotment, Bourke stated with almost visible reluctance.

With that the board declared the hearing concluded and retired to make its decision.

The Tucson men surrounded Bourke before he could avoid them.

"Lootenant, looks like a clear case in favor of Gomez," one of the contractors informed him.

"Absolutely. No two ways about it!" the other chimed in. "Say, is that board goin' to decide this soon or jest stall it along?"

Bourke answered stiffly: "The case has to be a matter of written record, but I believe the board will first make a verbal report to General Crook. The General, as the reviewing authority, has the final say."

"Well, I reckon I know what his say is goin' to have to be," drawled the correspondent. "Crook's too smart to rule against Gomez and do something that might put him in a bad light with the powers at Washington. Yes sree, you can bet your bottom dollar he keeps tabs on what's said about him. He follers the newspapers. Ever heard the pome that's been written about the General?"

"No—and I don't want to," Bourke snapped.

"Aw, come on, Loot! It's funny. The General ought to get a laugh out of it himself. Goes like this." He struck an attitude and recited:

*"I'd like to be a packer,
And pack with George F. Crook,
And dressed up in my canvas suit,
To be for him mistook.
I'd braid my beard in two long tails
And idle all the day
In whittling sticks and wondering
What the New York papers say."*

The reciter began to laugh but saw Bourke's fists clenching. "No offense, Lieutenant, no offense," he said hastily.

During the strained silence that followed, General Crook emerged from his office with the members of the board.

"Did you check the hoofmark, gentlemen?" he asked.

"Yes sir," Captain Henry replied.

"I'll have a look, too." The General stepped outside, accompanied by all the others.

Proverbio, swinging his ears forward, signaled recognition of a friend.

"Hello, old fellow. Let's see that hoof of yours," Crook said, designating the hoof in question.

With the respect and obedience due the "Granddaddy of the Pack-mule," Proverbio extended his near forefoot.

"Mark's there, sure enough," the General observed.

"Reckon that settles it, don't it, General?" put in the Tucson correspondent.

Crook ignored him. "H'm! Number's U.S. 201." He broke off and turned to Bourke to remark:

"Bourke, remember Blinky Jim, that lop-eared wheeler that pulled a water-cart for the 21st Infantry—a reprehensible old rascal of a mule if there ever was one?"

"Indeed I do, sir. Saw him at Fort Grant not long ago. There's not a mule in the Service so thoroughly saturated with depravity."

"You're right, Bourke. Blinky stepped on my foot once, and I recall plainly that heavy hoof of his." The General paused for effect. "The mark on it was U.S. 201."

He looked around the circle slowly. "My memory will be confirmed by the record; I am certain of that number. There is only one mule in the Army numbered 201. That is—and has been for years—Blinky Jim. This hoofmark is a forgery."

He paused again to let his words sink in. Then he added:

"I'm accusing no one and I'm not going into motives or investigating further at this time. . . . Packmaster de Vall!"

"Yes, General," Fray Luis responded, his face glowing.

"Take this mule of yours and don't let him take up any more of the Army's time."

CHAPTER TWELVE



HE fifty pack-mules of Train "A," divided into two parallel lines, stood facing each other, each tied to his cargo. Loads had been gauged carefully to each animal's strength by the *cargador*, Hank the Yank.

In most cases it was better than 300 pounds, some 125 pounds more than Army regulations required. The mules of all General Crook's trains were well able to carry extra weight, so careful had been his selection and so firm his insistence that they be perfectly conditioned. They would not fail to bring through their cargoes of rations and water, ammunition and camp gear. They had proved their stamina in hard practice marches.

This, thought Stephen Flint, standing with Chileno Juan to the rear of their string of mules, would be just another such march. It was not significant that supplies packed would suffice for a campaign of weeks. That was always done for packing practice and to train the mules, though they might be making only a one-day hike. In any event, today's was to be a long-scale move, for the other pack-trains were in readiness and over on the parade-ground all the cavalry companies on the post were forming. Yet, as Stephen knew, the odds were strongly against a campaign. The Government was still making efforts to conciliate the Apaches. Although the entire command from General Crook down was positive that all peace efforts would be futile, there was nothing to do but wait them out.

Hank barked the order to pack. The packers moved into brisk but unfurried action. Around the eyes of

every mule was bound the *tapajo* or blind, for the mule shares a curious characteristic of the ostrich which hides its head in the sand at the approach of an enemy and believes itself to be safe. If the mule can see the load being bound on his back, he will kick or otherwise object strenuously, while if he only feels it, weighty or not, all is well. As to packs, he reasons that what he doesn't see won't hurt him. Consequently the *tapajo* must always be used when cargo is loaded on a mule and even when his pack is being adjusted.

STEPHEN FOUND HIMSELF speaking Spanish as he packed—so many of the terms of the craft were in that language or adopted by the Spaniards from Arabia. He and Chileno, working in pairs, laid on each mule's back the *suadera* or sweat-cloth, extending from loins to withers, and over that two saddle-blankets. Next came that invaluable piece of equipment which makes the efficient use of pack-animals possible: the *aparejo*, introduced by the Moors into Spain in the Eighth Century. It was a strong leather sack divided into half by a seam, each side flap filled with straw which would protect the mule's back. Upon each side would rest a section of cargo, balanced in weight. Crook had demanded that each fifty-pound *aparejo* fit the mule that would carry it and thereby was prevented many a back sore.

Then they laid on the *corona*, or ornamental saddle-cloth. Around the *aparejo*, and the body of the animal they fastened a broad *cincha* or girth. One knee against the mule's barrel, Stephen tugged it tight with the *latigo* straps and made it fast, though the beast blew out his belly and grunted protestingly. Many steep climbs and descents must be made in the mountains; the *cincha* would keep the pack from slipping backward, as the crupper around the mule's rump would prevent it sliding forward. Lastly the two sections of the cargo itself were loaded, lashed on with the intricate diamond hitch and covered with waterproof canvas.

Stephen, Chileno, and the other packers whipped off the blinds and stood back. The train had completed its painstaking job, making certain that no pack would slip or gall, in under thirty minutes—fast time! Each saddled his riding-mule and mounted up. Stephen saw that Fray Luis was riding a tall gray mule and that Proverbio was under pack as the lead mule of the train.

A bell tinkled tunefully. Whitey the *cencero*, mounted on Blanca the bell-mare, rode along the line. Out from a knapsack slung over his shoulder peeped a tiny Mexican dog, white like his master's hair and Blanca's hide. Stephen, sighting the pet, smiled. The strange, silent little man, who could cook so well, seemed to have only one other interest in life—his love of animals.

Hank, too, caught sight of the occupant of the knapsack and called: "Whitey, you keep that animule away from the stew. I like *chile con carne* but not *chile con carne de perro*. Remember naow, Cookie! Chile with meat, but not chile with dog-meat!"

Whitey ignored him. As the bell-mare passed, the mules were released in turn—Proverbio first, and then all the rest of the train swung into file behind their equine Pied Piper. To the flank rode the packers, each watching the five mules of his string.

Yonder could be recognized the receding figure of General Crook, already on the road. He wore his suit of canvas and rode a mule, his rifle carried across the pommel of his saddle. With him rode another officer, and white and Apache scouts. The blue-clad cavalry, not yet whitened with dust, followed in column of fours.

"There," thought Stephen, "ride the fighting-men—yet they could not go far without the ammunition and supplies we are carrying for them!" He looked back at the long file of the pack-trains, mule after mule until the line seemed interminable. If these few hundred seemed impressive, what a spectacle must have been presented by

the greatest pack-train in history, whose story Fray Luis had read him last night; a tale of the Spanish conquest of Granada from the Moors. King Ferdinand had led the warriors but it was the remarkable Queen Isabella who organized his service of supply. Herself accustomed to ride a mule, the sumptuous trappings of which were resplendent with gold, the Queen assembled fourteen thousand mules for transport. "*Everything had to be borne by beasts of burden, over rugged and broken paths of the mountains, and through dangerous defiles, exposed to the attacks and plunderings of the Moors.*" The lad remembered that sentence—it was so parallel and timely, with Apaches substituted for Moors.

Fray Luis, riding beside the head of his train, felt his chest swell with pride. The mules, showing their fine condition, were expertly packed. He had made it what it was—this train of his, this train he led.

But instantly the conscience of the former Franciscan began to chide him for arrogance and conceit. Proverbio, to his right, turned his head and spoke:

"Master, there is a proverb. Will you hear it?"

"Willingly, Brother Mule."

"Thus it runs: 'It is a fine thing to command, though it be but a herd of cattle.'"

The sun rose higher in the heavens. It grew hotter—110 in the shade, and there was no shade. But the long column of men and animals, hardened by previous hikes, pushed on steadily. Back along it over the grapevine filtered the word that this practice march would be no affair of a day or two but an extended scout of some seven hundred miles.

Men sat up straighter in their saddles. If you marched seven hundred miles through Apache Land, things were bound to happen!

This would be a hunt, every cavalryman and packer in the column realized. The most stirring kind of a hunt—a man-hunt. There was no big game in existence as dangerous as the Apache.

Plenty of Indian sign, there was, none of it fresh. But up from mountain-tops, blue in the haze of distance, spiraled smoke signals—the Apache warning and defiance.

Heat closed down on the advancing column, bringing thirst which the strictly limited water-ration could not begin to slake. Mirages, visions of lovely, cool lakes, mocked and increased that thirst.

LIEUTENANT BOURKE, RIDING UP to the leading pack-train from a side scout, saw Stephen's parched lips working over his swelling tongue and reached out a hand.

"Here, carry a couple of these pebbles in your mouth," he advised. "It helps when it's a long time to the next drink. It's an old Apache trick. They've got another, too; I mean to try it some day: When they kill a horse or a mule, they cut out the long intestine and clean it out—none too carefully. Then they tie up one end, fill it with water and tie up the other end. There they've got a portable, flexible canteen. A brave hangs four or five feet of it around his neck, or if he's got a lead horse, winds twenty feet or so of canteen around its belly. Water they carry that way lasts 'em weeks."

"I don't know that I'm likely to get thirsty enough to try that!" Stephen answered. "Say, Lieutenant, is there a chance we'll jump any Apaches on this march?"

"Later, maybe. Meanwhile we certainly are learning the country. The General has us report everything we see on our scouts, even if it's only a coyote or a jackass-rabbit. You get noticing details that way." And he trotted up ahead.

The column pushed on, making camp, then breaking it and pushing on again. It emerged from the desert into the hills, winding through valleys bright with flowers gorgeous in color but robbed of their fragrance by the dryness of the atmosphere. And still no Apaches were found, alive or dead, unless you classed under the latter the dust whirlwinds which, legend declared, carried in



Proverbio apparently remarked: "Sir, there is no ugly sweetheart."

their embrace the spirit of some mighty chief. Then "F" Company of the Third Cavalry struck the trail of a large band of Chiricahua Apaches. The Indians took alarm and slipped away, but they had to leave a number of freshly slaughtered beeves, plunder of a recent raid. That night every mess feasted on steak.

Another band of raiders was trailed and pressed so closely that they were forced to abandon fifteen or twenty burros. Except that the Apaches had been deprived of them, they were an unwelcome encumbrance; a detail would have to be made to herd them until they could be turned in at the next ranch or post for claim by their owners. It was Fray Luis who volunteered to have his train take care of them. He was fond of the little animals, burden-bearers of the world like the mule. In the course of his life in the Southwest he had known and used hundreds. Yet he never had been able to look on one without reverent remembrance that an ass had carried Mary and her Child in the flight into Egypt and that one had borne Jesus when He rode in triumph over a palm-strewn path into Jerusalem. Fray Luis also recalled that the patron saint of the order to which he once had belonged, Francis of Assisi, had testified to the patient endurance of the donkey and to it compared his own tired body. When he came to die, St. Francis had begged pardon of Brother Ass, the Body, for having overburdened and mistreated it.

It was amusing to watch the attitude of the mules. Either they ignored the donkeys or were contemptuously hostile toward them. Despite the strong family resemblance, apparently no relationship was admitted. There was a belief among breeders that mules taking after their jackass parent have black stripes around their legs, down their backs and across their shoulders, as well as black manes and tails. But even mules with those markings paid no attention to these representatives of the paternal side of their family tree. In fact they acted just as snobbishly as human beings trying to disown poor relations who had suddenly bobbed up. Proverbio, as aloof as the rest, drew a smile and rebuke from Fray Luis.

"Proverbio, the moment has arrived when I must remind *you* of an ancient Spanish proverb."

"Speak it, Master."

"It runs thus: 'Mules made a great fuss about their ancestors having been horses.'"

"Mules and men of equally mixed descent?"

"Even so."

Ahead the cavalry was mounting up. Whitey whistled to his little dog and put him back in his knapsack berth. Climbing up into the bell-mare's saddle, the *cencero* rode forward. The bell around Blanca's neck gave forth its mellow tones, and the mules of the train dutifully responded. However they might disclaim the paternal line, they never failed in obedience toward their *madrina*—their little mother.

THE HEAD OF THE COLUMN rode one sunny afternoon into a pine forest, hushed and cool. Here was an ideal spot for a camp site. General Crook, riding in advance with three of his officers and Thomas Moore—the chief packer—was about to order a halt. The tinkling bells of the pack-trains in the rear lent a peaceful and pastoral air.

Then came the sudden swish of a flight of arrows. In an instant Crook and the vanguard had dismounted, and each man had found a tree, his weapon ready. Nothing could yet be seen, and not a shot was fired by the enemy. Crook, waiting, grinned appreciatively. The Apaches, sensing that more troops were following, were sticking to the silent arrow to avoid giving alarm. Perhaps they could deal with this small advance party before help could come up.

Crook, too, had an idea on holding fire. "Don't shoot," he called to the men behind trees to his right and left.

Arrows whirled and drove deep into the trees. Some entered as far as their feathers. These were Apaches of the Tonto band, mighty bowmen. Now they were beginning to work around flanks. Anxious glances were cast toward Crook. The sidewhiskers were jutting out belligerently, but still no order to fire was given.

Then that happened which Crook knew could be counted upon with a well-trained command. The connecting file had rushed word back to the main body. Deployed into long lines, the cavalry came trotting up; troopers on the extreme flanks pushed ahead until the line formed an arc, closing in to trap the enemy. Carbines began cracking.

But the forest was too dense. The Apaches slipped away through the trees.

Disappointed grumbling ran back through the column from trooper to packer. Why was the General letting them all get away? Was he just trying to scare the hostiles with a show of force? Because if he was, somebody ought to tell him Apaches don't scare. He'd have to split up the command and take 'em by surprise. That was the only way to do it. This way you only got surprised yourself!

Stephen Flint, echoing some of those complainings to Chileno, found that the train blacksmith had ridden up beside him and was listening. The lad subsided in embarrassment.

Tobias remarked: "I soldiered under the General in '64 and found out he knew what he was doin'. This here's a practice march, jest like he said it was. We aint lookin' for a fight yet. We're lookin' over this here Tonto Basin. Come we campaign here later, we'll know the ground—and be mighty glad of it."

"Sorry," Stephen apologized. "I was talking to hear myself talk, I guess."

"Guess ye were," Tobias agreed, and grinned. "Jest keep yer eyes and yer ears open, not yer mouth! Never can tell when ye'll see somethin' onexpected."

Pack-train "A" entered a long, wide cañon, its sloping sides covered with underbrush and boulders. Because it was a good place for an ambush, the cavalry had scouted it and even sent flankers up along the rims. The pack-

trains and the rearguard had been ordered to come on through.

But the mules of Train "A" showed definite signs of nervousness. Proverbio's ears twitched, though he kept on steadily. Mules farther back in the column began to lag and waver. Hank's voice could be heard:

"Get along, you drag-tails, get along!"

Stephen felt his hinny start trembling. What was wrong? Surely the cavalry could not have overlooked some lurking Indians. He patted the little mule's neck, then laid a hand on the reassuring butt of his six-shooter, loosening it in its holster.

Uncertainty showed also in the actions of veteran packers. Mules have many peculiarities, but ordinarily they are not given to baseless panic. Now they seemed on its verge. Fray Luis, herding scattering mules at the head of the line, waved to his *cargador* to keep the rest moving along rapidly. The sooner they traversed this cañon, the better.

Hank, assured the moment was ripe for some of the strongest epithets in his mule vocabulary, opened up with a zoological volley.

"Hi, you duck-billed platypuses! Steady there! You break out of line and I'll lay into you with this quirt, you white-faced bulbul! You wallaroos, you armadillos, you whiffets, show some sense, will you—"

Even that lurid language was useless. The whole pack-train suddenly disintegrated. Mules massed and milled around madly. They dashed off at frantic gallops in various directions, as if impelled by centrifugal force.

Seven bears had emerged from a cave in the slope. They came lumbering down on to the cañon floor. Most of the cavalry had passed without disturbing them. Then, becoming restless and believing they were being cornered, they had quit their refuge as the first pack-train was passing.

BEARS WILL BATTLE DESPERATELY when cornered. These seven—five big black fellows and two half-grown cubs—were bound to fight their way out of this trap.

A female, scrambling up the slope with the cubs, bowled two mules out of her way and was rushing a third when her back was broken by a bullet from Tobias' carbine. The cañon walls reverberated to roars and brays. Confusion multiplied into chaos. Stephen's hinny, crazed with fear, bolted, and his utmost strength could not hold her. The animal swerved aside from a big bruin in her path and half stumbled. Over her head sailed her rider.

Half-stunned, Stephen sat up.

A black mass reared up over him. He saw clawed forepaws menacingly raised over his head; little red eyes glared down on him, and from foam-flecked, gaping jaws there rumbled a thunderous roar. The prostrate packer tugged vainly at his pistol. Like an avalanche, the overhanging mass was about to sweep down on him. He shrieked and rolled to one side.

Four, five shots crashed close to him. The bear's immense weight thudded down beside him. Hank, a smoking pistol in one hand, dragged Stephen to his feet with the other hand. The *cargador* had run straight up to the lunging bear and fired through an ear into his brain.

"Thanks, Hank!" Stephen began.

"Never mind. Come on. Trouble up ahead," the tall New Englander yelled.

Toward the exit from the cañon, the mule Proverbio was held prisoner between two large boulders. He had tried to pass between them, but his cargo—not quite clearing—had wedged him in tightly. Unable to move forward or backward, he was a helpless victim in the path of an infuriated bear which believed the mule was blocking his only way of escape. Proverbio bared his teeth and lifted one forefoot to strike out, as the bear gathered himself to rush.

Crook laughed. "Luis, you are a gifted ventriloquist, but it is another talent I'm going to call on."



Something that stung like a hundred bees bit into the ursine's furry haunch. It was a bullwhacker's quirt in the hands of Fray Luis. Though without a firearm, as always, he handled the long whip with masterly skill. The bear wheeled away from the trapped mule and turned on him. *Crack!* The long lash exploded in its very face. The animal somersaulted backward.

"Courage, Brother Mule," said the gray-haired *patrón*, and placed himself in front of his four-footed friend.

Again the bear charged, and again recoiled as the lash tore one of his ears to bloody tatters. Hastily Fray Luis swept in the rawhide coils to strike a third blow. Now his face was altogether grim. He knew that if he should be a second late or should miss a tender spot, that would be the end.

Before the bear could attack a third time, Hank and Stephen had come up. They emptied their single-action Colts into the furious animal and Tobias finished him off with a carbine shot.

Five of the bears had been killed; the other two had vanished. Though some packs were scattered and rigging broken, none of the mules was injured. Letting the other trains pass through, the packers of Train "A" threw themselves into the task of rounding up their animals and repacking. It was a hard job but they went at it cheerfully. As lively a scrap as that was worth it!

Fray Luis, directing the work, spoke his gratitude to Hank and Stephen for coming to his rescue. Said the latter to his chief:

"You did not really need us, sir. You could have blinded the bear with that whip."

"If there had been any other way I would not have harmed the poor beast, but there are times when one must scourge the wrathful and wicked." Fray Luis smiled his grave smile and turned back to adjusting Proverbio's pack.

General Crook, riding back to inspect, could not hide his disappointment that he had missed a good bear-fight. But he heartily congratulated the train on losing no mules.

"Sergeant," said he to Tobias, giving him his old Army rank, "remember that story President Lincoln used to tell about the captured mules?"

"Yes, sir, but it aint respect'ful."

"That's all right. I'll tell it," Crook replied, grinning at the listening packers. "Back in the days when Union generals were losing the war, Lincoln got word that the Confederates had captured a general and forty mules. 'Well,' says old Abe, 'I'm sorry to lose the mules.'"

Gomez, taking his train through, tossed a remark that was sympathetic on the surface—but there was mockery beneath.

"What a pity some bears should have caused all this trouble! *Lo siento mucho* (I am so very sorry)."

Lieutenant Bourke rode up and heard the story of the fight. His keen friendly eyes scanned Stephen.

Said he: "That was a narrow one for you, young fellow, but you came through, as you've come through others. I think you must be destined for a ripe old age."

Hank the Yank was counting on his fingers. "I cal'late that makes about fifty b'ars I've killed since I come to Arizona. I'm a-goin' back home soon, marry that girl awaitin' fer me and run for Congress. Davy Crockett got 'lected to Congress for killin' one hundred and five b'ars in one season—but that was in Tennessee. Fifty b'ars ought to carry any New Hampshire district fer me. Aint nuthin' left there wilder'n bobcats and porkypines."

Said Tobias: "Better count in that gal that's waitin' fer ye. By this time *she'll* be purty wild!"

CHAPTER THIRTEEN



When they marched through that amazing land. In one day Crook's long column might traverse a lava bed, a cool pine forest, a stretch of desert. Emerging from dust-clouds which stifled men and animals and parched their throats with thirst, they descended into shadowy ravines through which rippled clear, cold streams. They came at length to Camp Apache.

It was the usual frontier post, raw and rough, but its situation was ideal. In front of it joined two branches of the Sierra Blanca River. Fields, ample for grazing many animals, surrounded it, and game was abundant in the timbered hills. Numerous friendly Apaches lived in the vicinity, farming and hunting. They had taken the white man's road and, following it, were content. Their chiefs talked often with General Crook whom they called "Captain-with-the-Brown-Clothes" because he did not wear uniform. He told them he came not to make war but avoid it if possible, and plainly they trusted his good faith and friendship toward them and all of the Apache people.

Stephen Flint, with a grim experience seared on his brain, distrusted and disliked even friendly Apaches, and told Lieutenant Bourke so.

"You're wrong about that," the officer corrected. "These Indians will play square as long as they're treated that way. You know, we're not fighting the Indians most of the time, but the Indian Ring. The Ring keeps the war going—it pays to do it. Soon as a bunch of Apaches settles down peaceably, the Ring sells 'em whisky, gets 'em drunk and starts 'em back on the warpath."

"And sells 'em repeating rifles while the Army only has single-shots."

"Sure. We've heard that the fine piece of work Fray Luis did on the Hopis cut down the sale of arms considerably. But any Apache warrior can buy a gun in Tucson or in a dozen towns below the Border. And when he gets a raw deal he uses the gun, and who can blame him? I suppose you know what the General himself said on that subject."

"No—what?" Stephen asked eagerly. Crook had won and kept his admiration from that day when the lad had mistaken him for a packer.

"He said: 'The American Indian commands respect for his rights only so long as he inspires terror for his rifle.'"

"I understand that. But I still get the creeps when any Apache looks at me with those beady black eyes they have. So you don't think we'll have any trouble with 'em around here?"

"No, I don't," Bourke replied. "Not as long as we can keep the Indian Ring away from them—and the troops here are doing just that."

Then a frown cleft Bourke's brow; his voice was acid when again he spoke. "It's a nice commentary on our civilization," he said, "when we let good soldiers die in the desert or mountains so their fellow white men can profit—collect their blood-money! Some call the Indian Ringers rattlesnakes. I don't! A rattler's a self-respecting reptile. What I call 'em is Judases."

With an effort Bourke resumed his accustomed calm. "No, we'll not have trouble here," he finished. "There's none of the Indian Ring around."

"Lieutenant," Stephen persisted, his expression very sober and meaningful, "are you *certain* there's none of 'em around?"

Bourke looked sharply at him. A current of understanding passed between them; the same image was focused in both their minds.

"Hmm," the officer murmured. "Keep your eyes on that man, Steve, my friend. I'll do the same."

Those few days' halt at Camp Apache afforded welcome rest and relaxation. The garrison mounted guard for Crook's column, and the guard—with all the Indians in the vicinity of proven friendliness—was a light one. Horses and mules enjoyed the fine grazing. At the messes, officers and enlisted men feasted on fresh meat and fish. Whitey and the other cooks need not unpack issue rations—mealy and monotonous beans, hardtack so graniteline that it was said to be necessary to soak it hours in hot water before even a pickax could dent it, salt pork with "six inches of fat and green whiskers on it." Some slabs were of such antiquity that they were discovered to be inscribed with Egyptian hieroglyphics, a learned quartermaster sergeant insisted.

Around the campfires there was the music of jew's-harps and harmonicas and singing. One trooper raised his voice in an Army favorite:

*I'll eat when I'm hungry
And drink when I'm dry.
If Apaches don't kill me,
I'll live till I die.*

General Crook, making rounds of the camp through the Arizona night, smiled. When soldiers sang, there was spirit in them. He walked on into the pack-train area. It was possible for him to join the packers, who were civilians, at their fires without the constraint which would occur if he stopped at those of the troopers. For reasons of military discipline an officer, especially the commanding officer, must set himself apart.

Fray Luis and his men welcomed the General at their fire. His confidence in and his liking for his packers was reciprocated by them. Silently Whitey, closely followed by his little white dog, brought Crook a tin cup full of hot coffee.

Sometimes the packers sang around their fire, particularly the men of Spanish blood. Chileno, the Mexican Lauriano, and others would harmonize the minor strains of *La Golondrina* or *Odios de Guaymos* until Fray Luis reminded them of the Spanish adage: "If a Spaniard sings, he is either mad or penniless." But more often, as tonight, they told tales of their own craft, the ancient craft of the muleteer, and of the extraordinary beast of burden with which they served.

FRAY LUIS SPOKE OF MULE-LORE in the Bible: How highly prized they became, once Anah had found them in the wilderness as he fed the asses of Zibeon, his father. How the Kings of Israel proudly rode them, and how the tribute paid King Solomon consisted of vessels of silver and gold, and garments, and armor and spices, horses, and mules. How Absalom, rebel against his father, King David, was beaten in battle and fled from the stricken

field through a forest. "And Absalom rode upon a mule, and the mule went under the thick boughs of a great oak, and his head caught hold of the oak, and he was taken up between the heaven and the earth; and the mule that was under him went away."

"Smaht critter, thet mewel," Hank commented. "Absalom was a bad *hombre*. Deserved hangin', he did."

The scholarly Lieutenant Bourke, strolling up and taking a seat, told of the admiring mention in Homer's "Iliad" of strong-hoofed harness mules; of the white mules of the Euphrates that drew the chariots of kings and princes, and of the gray mules of Egypt and High Barbary; of Bagdad in the time of the Caliphs where mules sold in the market for eighty pieces of gold; of the mules which were the favorite mounts of physicians in Paris, in the reign of Louis XIV. And how Cardinals would have their carriages drawn through Rome only by the dun-colored breed of Volterra.

CHILENO JUAN RELATED AN ADVENTURE of his with a pack-train in the Andes.

"*Señores*," he declared, "it was late in the season for a *conducta* to dare to cross the Andes, but our cargo was urgent, and we risked it. *Ati*, it was bitter cold! The Pass of Uspallata is more than twelve thousand feet above the sea, and ten thousand feet higher still the peaks of those mighty mountains towered above us. It is but hills you have in this land! The trail was steep and icy and it grew more narrow until—I swear it, *señores*—it was scarcely more than one foot wide. Winds came shrieking down from the summits, clawing and snatching at us and our mules.

"Now as we climbed higher, we were seized, both men and beasts, by the *soroche*. Thus we call the dreaded sickness which attacks one at great heights and makes one reel with dizziness. We were prepared with the cure. If one but chews garlic or onions, one is restored. Yet we had brought too little, and soon the supply gave out. To each muleteer remained only a morsel. Most used it for themselves.

"*Señores*, I rubbed the last bit of my garlic on the nostrils of my staggering, weakening mule, an animal to which I was much attached. I flung my arm about his neck. When other mules toppled over the edge of the trail, falling into eternity—some taking their muleteers with them—my faithful animal, grown strong and steady, marched on. Tottering and half-blind, I clung to his neck and he brought both himself and me and his cargo through in safety."

The pause following Chileno's story was broken by General Crook.

"The mule has never been more appreciated than during our Civil War," he remarked. "I've seen toasts drunk to the mule as 'the best soldier in the Army.' And whenever you asked a man to volunteer for a dangerous duty or any tough detail, remember what he'd say, Sergeant?"

"Yes, sir," Tobias answered promptly. "He'd say, 'Here's yer mule!' I made a mule of meself, a few times in those days. After the war too—that happened when peace come and I was mustered out. We had lot of trouble back in Kentucky with robber gangs. Bunch of us, farmers and such, got together and organized a secret sassiety fer law 'n' order. Called it the Order of Mules, and we had a grand lodge and local and an emblem in the shape of a skinny mule. We put the fear of the Lord into them scalywags! Afore we got through, us Mules sure left hoofprints on 'em!"

Lauriano told the story of the lost mines of Tayopa, silver bonanzas of the days when Spain ruled over Mexico.

"*Mes migos*, they were rich beyond belief, those mines, and no doubt still are. Over the Camino Real—the Royal Road—constantly traveled the *conductas*, trains of mules by the hundred, laden with supplies coming in.

Going forth, they bore cargoes of silver ingots for shipment across the Spanish Main. So vast were the deposits of silver that the very mules were shod with it. There it was more plentiful than iron or steel."

"Hasn't anyone an idea where those mines are?" Stephen Flint asked.

"Si," Lauriano nodded. "There are those who know, I believe—descendants of those who long ago killed the Jesuits who owned the mines, and all the miners, and sealed the mines and blinded the trail." The Mexican paused significantly and finished: "The Apaches!"

"And they won't tell. No more'n will dead men, like in the yarn I'll spin you," said a new voice.

The speaker was California Sam, a gray-bearded packer from one of the other trains who had been a "Fortyniner" in his youth. He had been a mule-skinner working for Wells-Fargo when that express company's pack-train, carrying \$80,000 in gold dust from the mines, had been jumped by Rattlesnake Dick Barter and his gang.

"Them road-agents ambushed us strung out on the trail with our mules and got the hull lot of it," Sam narrated. "Posse caught up with 'em later, shot some of 'em and got half the dust back. But meanwhile they'd buried \$40,000 somewheres on Trinity Mountain. Dick and the rest died with their boots on afore they could dig it up. It's still thar. Some day I'm going to git me a pack-mule and go back there, prospectin'."

But it was Hank who climaxed the evening with his yarn of Sam Wisser, the amateur medico.

"Sam and another feller is a-prospectin' daown Sinaloa way when his pardner up and dies," began the narrator. "Seems it be Sam's sad duty to settle and inherit the estate of the de-ceased. Waal, thet es-tate is one six-gun, one-half a mewel and a satchel pack-jammed with sech a lot of pills, powders, and potions as you never seen in all your born days. Haint nothin' one or t'other of them medicines won't cure—says so on the bottles and boxes.

"Trun 'em away, did he? Not Sam! Puts him up a shack, he does, tacks on a sign thet says *Medico*, and starts a-doctorin'.

"Folks come from all around to get treated. Don't matter what's ailin' 'em, ten pills of spirits of camphorated croton oil or a powder of Mother MacWhiff's Dogood or a snort of Siberian Swamproot, and right away they feel better. What's more, Sam's agreeable on fees. Takes anything from a two-bit piece to a string of chile colorado, he does.

"Every naow and then, Sam gits on his mewel and moves on to another field of endeavor. Right smaht thing for any doc to do, so it be; thet way he don't keep a-meetin' up with his mistakes every time he passes the buryin'-ground.

"Waal, comes a time when Sam moves faster'n usual. Happens like this: Mean-lookin' fat man comes in with a turrible, turrible pain in the belly. 'Nothin' but a miracle can cure me,' says he. 'My medicines does miracles,' says Sam, and he reaches for a big brown bottle and gives the patient the dangdest dose.

"Trouble is thet patient can read, and he gits a look at the label on the big brown bottle. Lets out a howl, he does, and goes for a real doctor. Good thing that mewel of Sam's was handy and fast!"

HANK, SHAKING HIS HEAD, relapsed into a tantalizing silence and gazed into the fire.

"All right, Hank," Lieutenant Bourke said, grinning. "I'll ask you: What *was* the medicine in that big brown bottle?"

Thus requested, Hank condescended to enlighten his audience.

"Thet there medicine," he revealed, "was Lady Lydia's Maternal Elixir, ab-so-lute-ly guaranteein' thet anybody thet tuck it would hev at least one baby onct a year."



For a second the Apache delayed his thrust. To the rear a tall man fired. The bullet took the Apache full in the chest. He staggered, then turned to flee.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

PACK-TRAIN cooks were always the earliest risers. On the march, Whitey was up at two A.M. to start breakfast and often he would look up from his fire to greet General Crook, come for a cup of coffee. Breakfast under way, Whitey would mount Blanca and ride out to bring in the mule herd.

Since the column was still in bivouac at Camp Apache and was not yet moving out to complete its practice march, Whitey rose later this morning. His little dog Chiquito, loath to leave the blankets where he had slept warm and snug with his master, followed shiveringly to warm himself at the fire. Coffee on, Whitey saddled Blanca, took his pet up in his arms, mounted and rode out to the *mulada*.

A crescent moon slightly dispelled the blackness of the night. By its light, herd guards watching the mules of Pack-train "A" in an outlying pasture descried the man approaching on the white bell-mare. Whitey answered their challenge. The troopers waved and rode on back to the post. They knew that the *cencero* would now lead the mules in to be watered, fed and groomed by the packers. There could be no further need of a guard, with only friendly Indians in the vicinity.

Whitey glanced around him. Dawn could not be far off now. The dark shapes of the mules of the train—Proverbio and the rest—were around him, still blurs but beginning to take more distinct form. Whitey could see that their ears were pricked up; a few of them were stamping and snorting. It was more attention than they generally paid his familiar advent, but then mules are temperamental. They began to drift toward him, glad to be led in to a feed of grain.

Whitey tenderly placed his dog in the front of his jacket and buttoned him in securely. He took up Blanca's reins and started to bend down to unmuffle her bell.

The little white-haired man died as silently as he had lived. A long arrow transfixing his throat, he sat for a moment bolt upright without even swaying. Then he toppled from the saddle and fell heavily to the ground, face downward. From the dog buttoned in his jacket came only one muffled cry of pain, scarcely audible.

A shadowy figure glided through the restless, snorting mules. The gentle Blanca, trembling, tried to rear as a strange rider vaulted into her saddle. She found herself helpless. Cruel Apache hands pulled the reins taut till the bit lacerated her mouth. Strong Apache legs gripped her. A copper-colored hand unmuffled her bell, and heels in her flanks drove her forward.

The white mare was ridden at a fast walk toward the forest. Swinging at her neck, her bell tolled its mellow, compelling tones. Loyal every mule of the train gave mare and bell his allegiance. They moved toward her to follow in line. Proverbio's ears twitched back and forth nervously—but he, like the rest, refused not the summons of the bell. As usual, he led the line and took up his accustomed place behind Blanca.

Vanishing into the cover of the forest, the Apache raider looked back at the captured herd and grinned. He walked the mare out as fast as he dared. Soon he would break into a trot. He must put much distance behind him before the loss was discovered.

The sky was lightening, and the outline of the still body on the grass was clearer.

Out from under it struggled something small and white. The little dog at last managed to free himself.

Chiquito panted and tottered on his weak legs, obviously badly injured in the crushing fall of his master. He licked one of the cold, outflung hands; then raising his pointed muzzle, the tiny animal howled piteously. . . .

"Hi, there, packer!"

A cavalryman hailed Stephen Flint, who had rolled out of his blankets late, like the rest of the pack-train. They had not been awakened by Whitey returning with the mule herd and the musical chiming of Blanca's bell. Hank had just told Stephen to borrow a mount and ride out to investigate.

"Hi, soldier!" the lad answered.

The cavalryman held out a limp white object. "Seems like I seen this little purp around your train. Pore little feller's dead, I reckon. Picked him up back yonder on the road—looked like he was tryin' hard to crawl back to your camp and jest couldn't make it. Somebody must have stepped on him or something fell on him. Sorry. You folks'll miss him."

Stephen thanked the trooper and hurried to Fray Luis. There was no cut on the body of Chiquito, but there was blood on his white hide; something tragic had happened.

FRAY LUIS, HIS EXPRESSION very grave, acted quickly. The packers were dismounted, and only the *patrón's* riding-mule had been picketed at camp. In two minutes Fray Luis was galloping to Headquarters. General Crook had scarcely heard a sentence before he was firing orders at his aide, Lieutenant Ross.

"Turn out two cavalry companies immediately. Have 'em report to me out at the Train 'A's' mule-pasture."

Ross rushed through the door on the double. Down at the picket lines bugles blared *Boots and Saddles*. Crook's riding-mule was brought around. He and Fray Luis galloped for the pasture.

As they thundered up, they saw it was empty except for an ominous heap. Soon they were bending sadly over the body of Whitey. The feathered shaft through his throat told its story.

"*Requiescat in pace*," Fray Luis bade, making the sign of the Cross over his friend.

A pony's hoofs drummed, and the two men looked up. News had spread fast. The chief of the friendly Apaches living around the post had heard of this and had come.

"This was not done by my people," he declared, gesturing toward the body. "I speak true words. We live in peace and follow the white man's path. Does the Captain-with-the Brown-Clothes believe?"

Crook looked him in the eye. "Yes, I believe you," he asserted.

"Some one of the Tinde whose heart is bad came here to do you harm," the chief said. "Come, I will lead you on the trail. We must ride fast, or he is gone beyond our reach."

Blue coats showed through a white cloud of dust on the road. Crook waved the cavalry on after them, as he and Fray Luis rode beside the chief at a steady canter. The trail was plain and fresh enough, but the chief, leaning over his pony's neck to scan it, shook his head. Whoever had run off the mule herd had a fair head-start and was moving rapidly, as the hoof-marks in the ground showed. Furthermore the trail led in a direction the chief did not like. He called back over his shoulder: "This way go through gate of cañon. Small place—maybe blocked."

His apprehension was justified. They came after hard riding to a narrow cañon entrance. It was solidly stoppered by a huge boulder which had been rolled down into it from the slope above, barring all access.

Yes, there were ways around, the chief admitted, but they would take far too long.

Crook barked an order to a cavalry captain. "Send men back into the timber there. Find some fallen trees small enough to lever this boulder out of the way."

The chief was pulling at Crook's sleeve. "Place to see from," he said, and led the way back up to the summit of a steep hill to the rear. From that vantage-point the country beyond the pass spread out before them. The chief suddenly pointed. There in the distance was the white bell-mare with an Apache astride her. The whole mule-train was following in a decorous line.

Something prompted the raider to glance back. Before the three men on the crest could take cover, he spotted them. Instantly his arm began rising and falling, swinging a quirt. Though he was leading the mule-train up a steep slope, he flogged Blanca mercilessly. The mare was forced into a desperate, leaping climb. Faithfully her following mules speeded their pace.

"Over that hill is hard country to catch him," the chief growled.

It seemed highly possible that the raider might make a clean getaway before the pass could be cleared. The cavalry had carried no ax. It would be hard to find fallen trees suitable to use for leverage.

Helplessly the three on the height watched the flight, and ground their teeth in their impotence.

Then they beheld a strange and stirring spectacle: The leading mule in the train had dashed forward until he was abreast of the bell-mare. Ears laid back flat along his neck, he was attacking the Indian who was so cruelly beating her.

"Proverbio!" shouted Fray Luis in a great voice full of exultation.

The mule, his long neck outstretched, was biting savagely at the Apache. Vicious blows of the quirt were aimed at his head by the angry Indian. Proverbio dodged them or endured them. His gleaming teeth narrowly missed a grip on the flailing red arm. Again the rider struck at him.

"Ah, Brother Mule, he will blind you!" Fray Luis groaned.

Crook's grip tightened on his rifle, but he did not level it. The range was too great for any precision.

The battling had slowed the climb of the animals, yet the crest was not now far off. Both mule and Indian appeared to have drawn blood, for they were more wary of each other.

THEN CAME REINFORCEMENT—not the cavalry, for they still were struggling with the blocking boulder, but other mules of the train, seeing the mistreatment of their *madrina* and hearing the wild jangling of her bell, began to come, like Proverbio, to her aid.

The spectators on the height could imagine that a touch of dismay must have shown even on the stoical Apache face of the raider. Besides the fighting brown devil which had been harassing him, more were closing in. They were on both sides of him, snorting and snapping. There was only one thing to do: He must shoot his way out.

The Apache dropped his quirt, unslung his bow and reached for an arrow.

Those movements were fatal! Proverbio lunged, fixed his teeth in the rider's thigh and hung on like a bulldog. A dun mule on the off side reared and struck the Indian with his forefeet. Blanca, the grip of the rider relaxed, plunged out from under him. The Apache vanished beneath a milling mass. Sharp hoofs pounded and churned. It was no easy death—nor could an easy death have been wished for him even by the gentle Fray Luis. The image of Whitey, shot from behind, was too vivid in his mind.

"We're through, sir," called a sergeant, galloping up.

Crook told him: "There was only one raider and he's gone down. But there may have been others coming to meet him. Get over to that slope, round up those mules and bring 'em in."

Blanca was leading the herd when it came back through the pass. Fray Luis dismounted to pat her soft

muzzle. Then he whistled. The lead mule trotted up. There was moisture in the *patrón's* eyes as he flung both arms around the neck of the valiant Proverbio.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN



FRAY LUIS was having his difficulties with Proverbio. The mule had been receiving too many admiring callers since his running battle with the Apache on the bell-mare. Almost every officer and enlisted man in Crook's command and the garrison of Camp Apache dropped over to the Train "A" picket-line.

"There's the fightingest mule in the U.S. Army, and that's saying something!" Such was the tenor of the acclaim they gave him.

From a respectful distance friendly Apaches also looked the mule over. That long-ear, they told each other with superstitious awe, was not what he seemed. He was a demon in disguise.

Proverbio, as usual with mules under prolonged inspection, grew irritable. Defiantly he rolled in the dust and had to be groomed repeatedly. He showed the whites of his eyes, laid back his ears and lashed out with his heels, living up to his reputation as a man-killer. His master alone could soothe and calm him. Fray Luis was on the point of ordering him segregated from all visitors, when orders for the resumption of the march saved the situation.

West and northwest they marched. Again the pack-trains functioned excellently. In "A" there was sadness for the loss of poor Whitey and his little dog. Chileno Juan rode Blanca, acting as *cencero* and cook until a new man could be signed on. The trains alternated in taking the lead. Once when Train "C" passed them, Stephen marked the look of scowling malevolence which its *patrón*, Pablo Gomez, cast at Fray Luis and Proverbio. The one-time Franciscan seemed not to have seen it. He looked only for the good in people; evil he could not ignore, but he disregarded it.

At one encampment Lieutenant Bourke rode over and drew Fray Luis and Stephen aside.

"I'm telling this to you two," he said in a low voice, "because you've been concerned in this business from the beginning. Notice anybody giving you a mean look lately?"

"No, I did not," Fray Luis answered.

"You wouldn't," the officer observed with a smile. "But I guess my friend Steve did. He's been drawing my attention to a certain party. Well, after your mules were run off, I got talking to the General. Asked him how he thought it happened that one renegade Apache shows up and tries a trick like that in the midst of a friendly tribe. Of course we never did find out who the renegade was—your mules didn't leave enough of him! I suggested to the General that Packmaster Gomez might be able to give him some helpful advice, seeing that Gomez knows Apaches right well."

"He knows them well? How should he?" Fray Luis inquired.

"I found something out from one of his packers who's a friend of mine." Bourke lowered his voice still more and said slowly and significantly: "Gomez was once an Apache captive."

"He was! How did that happen?" Stephen asked with fascinated interest.

"As Fray Luis knows, most prisoners captured by the Apaches don't live long as a rule—no longer than it takes to drive an arrow or a lance through 'em or knock 'em over the head. They keep some of their captives a little longer, to drag information out of 'em or for torture—or both. Hanging a man head down over a slow fire will make some men talk. Anything to get a quick

death! But it's different when they capture children, American or Mexican. Of course if they're just babies, who are going to be too much trouble to take care of, your practical Apache brave simply grabs 'em by the legs and dashes out their brains against the nearest rock or tree."

Both Fray Luis and Stephen shuddered. "Alas, it is true," the former admitted. "But do not forget that they are good to older children. They adopt them into the tribe and treat them with great kindness."

"I was going to say so, Fray Luis. Older children they capture become slaves. But once they learn the Apache language and the ways of their masters—"

Stephen broke in excitedly: "So that's why I heard Gomez speaking Apache back in Tucson!"

"Sure. Your report on that is what gave me the idea, and I followed it up. Well, some of those youngsters taken prisoner grow up as regular Apaches. They own property and have a voice in the councils. Some even become chiefs. But others won't turn Injun. Sooner or later they make a break—and if they escape, they return to their own people. That's what P. Gomez did."

Said Fray Luis: "He could be more useful to General Crook, if he would."

"And he could be more useful to the Indian Ring, if he would," Lieutenant Bourke countered.

"Which does he choose?" Stephen asked.

There was a quizzical look in Bourke's keen eyes.

"*Quién sabe?*" he remarked. "Who knows? I don't. But when the General sent for him and asked for his help in the matter of that lone Apache raider, Gomez couldn't seem to think of anything helpful."

THE PRACTICE MARCH ended at Fort Whipple, military post for the town of Prescott, a town as American as Tucson was Spanish. General Crook established headquarters there for his entire Department. Thence he traveled by mule-back, in ambulance or buckboard over the vast territory under his command. To spare his men, he all too often went without escort.

For soldiers and packers were kept steadily on the go. The troops continued their scouts and pursuits of Apaches, taking casualties and inflicting them. The pack-trains were constantly employed in distributing from post to post the supplies which had made the long hard journey all the way from San Francisco, coming most of the way by river-steamers and the last two hundred miles by heavy freight-wagons.

Contractors who had handled the inter-post freighting howled loud and long when the Army trains took over. Crook paid not the slightest heed. His method not only saved the Government money, it kept the pack-trains fit and efficient. The mules stayed hardened, and packers grew increasingly adept in throwing the diamond-hitch and every other hitch of their craft.

"Sir, the Indian Ring isn't going to like our cutting in on the freighting," Lieutenant Bourke dared remark to General Crook. "Some of them have been making a mighty good thing out of it."

"I know, Bourke," Crook answered. "The Ring doesn't like my system of letting the reservation Apaches supply the posts with hay and wood, either. The Indians pay for a large part of their rations that way. Money the contractors used to get is going to the Indians now and it's making them self-supporting and self-respecting."

"It is, sir."

"Send out every pack-train we've got and keep them on the move," was the order.

Bourke saluted, his eyes glowing. . . .

Train "A" was back a day from its second trip when Fray Luis appeared at the picket-line with new orders in his belt. The mule Proverbio was trailing his master like a large and faithful dog, as he so often did. A group of the packers gathered around. Hank asked:

"Where now, *Patrón*?"

"Perhaps only to Date Creek. I have not yet finished reading the order," came the answer. Fray Luis glanced for a second at Stephen, then away, and there was a twinkle in his eyes as he continued: "I cannot understand why they do not send us to Tucson. Other trains have been sent there. It seems strange."

"So it be," Hank agreed. "Our turn. Nice town, Tucson. Has attractions. Right purty girls there!"

Stephen flushed. Carmelita had been often in his thoughts; it surely would be good to see her again.

Proverbio rubbed his jaw on his master's shoulder and seemed to say:

"I am reminded again of the old Spanish proverb which affirms, 'Absence is the wind which puts out a little fire and fans a big one.'"

The packers grinned broadly, and spread out their hands toward young Stephen as if warming them before a hot blaze.

"That is a true saying," Fray Luis concurred, "yet sometimes it is a pity that it should be so. Sometimes it happens that the long-absent one returns only to find, as another proverb maintains, that—"

"A girl's love is water in a basket," Proverbio finished.

"A girl should not be left overlong alone," Fray Luis mercilessly continued. "When a young man deserts his *novia* for months, who can blame her if she forgets him?"

"Nobody kin!" proclaimed Tobias loudly. He like the other packers was delighted when their grave *patrón* gave rein to the merriment deep in him.

"The young man, though spurned, will still have his memories," Fray Luis teased on. "And tender are the memories of a first love."

"A proverb," Proverbio said, "truly declares that, 'Of soup and love, the first is the best.'"

Now the packers were guffawing with glee and pounding each other's backs. Stephen, being a good sport, was managing a grin but biting his lip at the same time. The words were spoken in jest, he knew, but they might prove all too true. It had been many weeks since he had seen Carmelita, and she did have plenty of beaux. In spite of the vigilant guardianship of Tia Teresa, they would have been doing considerable courting—just as he had done when he was on the scene.

Fray Luis, seeing his young friend's suffering, contritely hastened to put an end to it. He drew the paper from his belt and read it.

"Hmm," he murmured. "I should have read this before. *Cargador*!"

"*Patrón*," Hank responded. "Your orders?"

"There is cargo at the quartermaster's shed. Pack and be prepared to lead out in two hours."

"Destination, *Patrón*?"

"Tucson, *Cargador*."

CHAPTER SIXTEEN



MEXICAN boy, trudging out from Tucson to where Train "A" was encamped on its old site at Camp Lowell, ceremoniously placed a letter in Stephen's hands. Stephen thanked him in Spanish and gave him a coin, but the boy lingered. He had not yet extracted the full value from this occasion. He pointed at the letter.

"It is an invitation to the ball," he imparted, speaking English. "Surely the *Señor Americano* will accept."

"Why, I haven't yet decided."

"You must go," the boy decided for him. "There will be much good food. And fine music. And bright lights and dancing. And"—he added it off-handedly as a matter of possible interest to this young man—"there will be girls, of course."

Stephen grinned. "I suppose they have to have them." "So it seems," the boy agreed resignedly. "If the *señor* has a *novia*—a sweetheart—in town, she will be at the ball. I will be watching through the window. *Adios* and *gracias, señor*."

Stephen's heart beat faster at the thought of seeing Carmelita at last. Since the train's arrival, he had been kept so hard at work he had not been able to pay even a brief call. Well, he consoled himself, even if he had been able to call, Tia Teresa—sternest and most watchful of *dueñas*—would not for a second have left him alone with the girl, nor have failed to censor conversation. This ball, however, would undoubtedly offer superior opportunities.

SINCE HE KNEW FRAY LUIS would chaff him, Stephen went to Chileno Juan for advice.

"Nowhere could you find the better counsel," Chileno announced. "When I was young in Chile, there was no *caballero* more dashing. So little could the girls resist me, it became wise for me to leave the country. Now I am old and no longer care to pursue or be pursued. Long ago I learned the truth of the proverb—Fray Luis and his mule, were they here, would speak it for you—'Woman is like your shadow. Follow her, she flies. Fly from her, she follows.'"

"But you are too young to believe that. Now at the ball you can whisper in the ear of your *novia* when you dance. You can speak to her with your eyes. But to prove your devotion, after the ball you must serenade her."

"Serenade her! I never serenaded anybody in my life!"

"Now you must begin. Can you sing?"

"Yes, a little."

"Do you play the guitar?"

"I can sort of strum one."

"*Bueno!* I will teach you '*La Paloma*' or '*La Golondrina*.'"

"Well, I've kind of made up a song myself. It's about moonlight and marimbas."

"Marimbas. *Muy bueno!* A most melodious instrument. What sweet sounds can proceed from blocks of wood when struck with little hammers! It may be I can find the marimba in Tucson to play for you while you sing."

"Thanks a lot, Chileno, but if you don't mind, I think I'd rather do my serenade alone."

"Oh, often the serenade has the assistants. Perhaps a friend to sing a second part, perhaps two or three guitarists. The more who serenade, the more it is the compliment to the lady. There is, of course, the limit—one must not bring the full band."

"Just the same I'd better go it alone. I won't be so good, but at least I'll get all the lady's attention."

"As you wish, *compadre*. Now of what else does your song speak besides marimbas? Does it declare you are filled with woe and despair? Does it swear to the lady that if she does not smile on you, you will go forth and die in the desert? Does it assure her that if she gazes upon you with her eyes so beautiful, you will be as if sunstroked?"

"No, I'm afraid it doesn't do any of that."

"*Ai, ai!* Then it is a song no good for a serenade. You must have another."

"Thanks, *compadre*, but I'll stick to this one."

Chileno shrugged. "It is yours to choose. Anyway, you will not know what the lady thinks. It is not proper for her to speak after the serenade."

The ball was all the messenger-boy had foretold to Stephen it would be. Lieutenant Bourke, who had ridden into town on detached service, had suggested they go together. Swinging along by the side of his companion, debonair in Army blues with the bright yellow stripe of the cavalry along his breeches, Stephen had felt drab in

his best suit of dark broadcloth, but he soon forgot that, once a pair of bright eyes had shown him approval.

Always the ball would remain glamorous in his memory. What if the ballroom floor was earthen and the lights only a dozen candles stuck in tin sconces? What if the music was more spirited than melodious? What if the benches held a score of dragonlike *dueñas*, glaring suspiciously? It was all but a setting for Carmelita!

His eager eyes found her quickly. With a young infantry officer she was floating through the lively figures of a square dance, a vision in black lace over golden-yellow silk, all swirling flounces, and fringes. Over a white shoulder her brown eyes spied him, and her lips parted in a smile that left him dazed.

Bourke, grinning, brought him to, with a slap on the back.

"We'll dance the next set, Stephen," he said. "Here you need no introduction. Which one of the dear little creatures will you choose—Anita, Victoria, Concepcion, Guadalupe, Mercedes? But perhaps you'd better favor Carmelita first. After all, she helped take care of you. Now here's a new figure. 'On with the dance! Let joy be unconfined!'"

Stephen hurried across the floor. The next instant he had both her hands in his, and they were gazing deep into each other's eyes. They stood there like that until someone—probably Tia Teresa!—ordered the music to start. Flute, harp, bass drum, and "bull-fiddle" chimed in. A high nasal voice called the figures:

"Alleman' left 'n' all shassay. Dozy-dozy chaat 'n' swing. Balance t' yer podners 'n' all han's 'roun'!"

They danced and danced again. There was so much Stephen had to tell her, so much he wanted to say. Yet the lively figures of the square dances left him scarcely a chance for a word. When Carmelita placed a soft little hand in his calloused one to be swung, or when his arm went around her slender waist to "shassay" down the line, then he might have spoken—but he was speechless.

The instant the music made one of its brief pauses, there was Tia Teresa, watchful and wary, at their side; either they could talk about the weather or fall silent. They chose the former, and when Tia Teresa's attention was distracted for a moment, they stole glances at one another. Lines of the poem Bourke had begun to quote hummed in Stephen's head:

*"Soft eyes looked love to eyes which spake again,
And all went merry as a marriage bell."*

A final flourish, and the music was silent. The ball was over. It could not be possible—Stephen could not believe it—but the evening had fled. Before he realized it Tia Teresa had whisked Carmelita home—right out from under his eyes.

Stephen's hands were cold. It was time for that serenade. . . . And how he dreaded it!

The understanding Bourke had taken the band and the rest of the cavaliers off to serenade girls living some distance away, leaving Stephen a clear field. That amateur serenader found his guitar and determinedly drove lagging feet to the Casa Perez. Feeling extremely foolish, he took his stand beneath a window where Carmelita had assured him she would be listening, strummed some chords and began to sing in a clear tenor:

*"Mexico, where the moon is yellow.
Mexico, and marimbas mellow.
Golden tones and golden light above.
Shadows in the patio—and love."*

Two Mexican passers-by had halted in the street behind him, and had been listening. As Stephen paused before the refrain of his song, they broke into appreciative applause. He must be doing well when Latins, doubtless past-masters in the art of serenading, deigned to com-

pliment the efforts of a mere gringo! But he was uncomfortable and embarrassed. He could not rid himself of the feeling that serenading, like other ways of making love to a girl, ought not to be so public.

However, the Mexicans strolled on down the street. Stephen concentrated on Carmelita, so near and yet so far. With yearning in his voice, he sang the refrain:

*"Moonlight and marimbas
In romantic Mexico;
Moonlight, love, and music
In a vine-clad patio."*

*It was there a charming señorita of Senora
Told her caballero she would be his sweet señora.
Moonlight and—"*

A prolonged and joyous "hee-haw!" resounded from the "vine-clad patio." That was the mule Proverbio. Even if Stephen had not known that Fray Luis was staying in the Casa Perez with his kinsman, he would have recognized that bray!

It was too much. Muttering, Stephen unslung his guitar.

A silvery giggle—yes, it was silvery, though a giggle—halted him. Carmelita, defying all convention, whispered from behind the shutters:

"You were the best, Esteban—*querido*."

Stephen swung away, walking on air. In spite of everything, the serenade had been a success. Carmelita had called him "*querido*" or "dear one, beloved!"

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN



RAY LUIS' urgently spoken orders had waked Stephen Flint at dawn:

"Saddle Proverbio and your hinny. Take one day's ration for us and a feed of grain for the animals. We are riding on ahead to Prescott at once. The *cargador* will take the train to Camp Date Creek."

The pack-train was well on its way back to its base from Tucson, and Stephen, stumbling down to the picket-line, was still resentful that they had not stayed on in Tucson a little longer. If only he could have seen Carmelita once more before he left! It had been hard luck to have marching orders come the morning after the ball and his serenade.

While he watered and fed the mules, Stephen, more wide awake now, began to wonder about this ride. It must have something to do with the Hualpai Indian he had noticed talking to Fray Luis. As unobtrusively as he had come, the Indian slipped out of camp while Stephen was saddling. His message must have been of some importance to cause the *patrón* to make a side trip to Prescott while the train went on to pick up freight at Date Creek as originally planned.

The two riders soon were on the road, their mules walking with a smooth ambling gait. They would have to travel if they were to reach Prescott by nightfall, for it was a good forty miles.

Stephen's curiosity as to their errand mounted. Fray Luis, his expression serious, was not long in satisfying it. He said: "Stephen, we are riding on a vital matter. As soon as our mules' legs are warmed, we must push on fast. This morning an Indian friend of mine brought me word that must reach General Crook at the earliest possible moment. I shall tell you the whole story so that you will not fail to understand the importance of the message we must take through—you and I, who have the two fastest mules in the train. Listen now."

Fray Luis told him of the wrecked stagecoach he had seen some weeks ago in the course of his journey to the pueblo of the Hopis, its driver and all but two of its passengers massacred, the team stolen, the mails rifled. It



Lieutenant Ross threw himself forward and struck up the arm of the would-be assassin. The council circle disintegrated.

was possible that the assailants were Apaches from the Date Creek Agency. If so, it was brutal and traitorous murder by Indians pretending friendliness and accepting rations and clothing from the Government. They must be traced and punished.

Crook had commenced and pressed a thorough investigation. Recently it had grown warm. The trail of guilt pointed toward some of the leading men in the tribe, though none of their tribesmen would betray them. The renegades, however, had begun to suspect that the search had made progress and was narrowing down to them. Already one of them had slipped away to take refuge in Lower California. The rest stayed, but made ready to strike. They planned a deed which would bring terror and dismay to the white man. If it succeeded, he would not for many moons dare again to war on the Tinde: When next General Crook came to Camp Date Creek, he and all with him were to be murdered. So the Hualpai had solemnly sworn, revealing the conspiracy to Fray Luis.

Stephen gasped. But how could they succeed? he asked. The General was too wary. The Indians them-

selves called him the Gray Fox. Also there was an Army garrison at the camp.

The plot had a first-rate chance of success, Fray Luis made him understand. His informant had given him its clever details. Crook was to be called from his quarters for a council on matters affecting the tribe. When he sat down in the council circle, every Apache would carry a carbine concealed under his blanket or laid carelessly across his knees. The talk would go smoothly. Shortly one of the conspirators would roll and light a cigarette. His first puff would be the signal for the Indian next to Crook to kill the General, while each of the others shot the white next to him. The whole tribe would then break for its mountain hide-outs.

"I dread that it will work all too well, unless we get our warning through," Fray Luis ended grimly. "The General will not refuse a council. He who always plays fair with the Apaches will not suspect them of playing false. . . . Trot!"

Trot, gallop, and walk again; no more than a brief rest now and then. They rode hard but it was a long ride, and Fray Luis gauged their pace to the animals'

powers. A horse can be ridden to death, but not the mule—beaten and spurred he may be, but he will quit within the limits of his endurance.

Proverbio and the hinny responded to the effort asked of them. Stephen, growing very saddle-weary, drew strength from the example of his chief. Well on in years though he was, Fray Luis rode with wiry liteness. But a hint of the gray of fatigue showed through his tan, and the lines in his face seemed to have deepened.

Walk, trot, and gallop, the riders pushed on. There was an image in both their minds—Crook slumping forward in the council circle, and a treacherous Apache standing over him with smoking carbine.

Prescott at last; one more weary mile to Fort Whipple. The riders dismounted and strode stiffly into Headquarters. A soldier clerk working at a table greeted them.

"Where's General Crook?" Fray Luis demanded.

"Gone to Camp Date Creek," the soldier answered. "Cap'n Dwyer, the C.O. down there, was took sick sudden and died, and the Gen'l decided to— Why, what's the matter, Packmaster?"

"Date Creek," said Fray Luis, swaying a little, "is sixty miles from here."

"Yep, that's right—'bout sixty miles southwest. . . . Where's the Adjutant? He's over there in his office."

The listening clerk heard fragments of the Adjutant's conversation with the visitors.

"The General? Left yesterday—yes, for Date Creek. . . . Catch him? Don't know if we could. He moves fast. . . . No, you can't either of you go after him—both dead on your feet. What's the idea, anyway? . . . What! Are you sure? I'll send the fastest— Orderly! Orderly!"

HANK THE YANK'S BROW was furtowed, his shrewd New England mind clicking off conclusions.

Fray Luis, never one to keep his second-in-command in the dark, had taken time before he rode off to tell him confidentially of the plot against General Crook's life; had declared that he expected to reach Prescott in ample time with the warning. Before the pack-train left for Tucson Crook had stated that pressing duties would keep him at Headquarters for several days at least after the train's return. He would be safe as long as he did not go to Date Creek; and there would be no reason for him to go, with an able officer in command there.

But what if— That question kept beating against Hank's brain. What if Crook did go, and what if Fray Luis had failed to reach him and what if Crook attended the Apache council and—

Hank had had all he could stand of that. He bellowed to the Mexican Felipe, Whitey's successor:

"Cencero, walk that mare out! Tired, be you? Walk out! Pronto!"

The pack-train's route to Date Creek was the short base of a triangle with two long legs. Fray Luis was riding one of those legs to Prescott. If he did not find the General there, he or someone else would have to ride down the other leg southwest to the Agency where the plot had been hatched. That would take considerable time. Just in case, it might be well for the people with the shortest distance to go, to cover it fast.

So Hank drove his train, drove it as it never before had been driven. The packers stared at the ordinarily careful and considerate *cargador*. Hank ignored them. Only to Tobias did he curtly remark:

"Might be some big doin's at Date Creek. Wouldn't want to miss 'em."

He rode up and down the line, keeping the mules closed up. If one so much as turned his head to right or left, Hank dubbed him a scenery-loving so-and-so, and flung at him every epithet he could remember. The miles were ticked off by the well-conditioned animals. Not so much as one shifting pack delayed them; these packers knew their craft.

It was record time that the train made, and it was still going strong at the finish. Hot and blowing a little, the pack-mules came into Camp Date Creek at a trot. Hank shouted orders to walk them around till they cooled off, then wipe them down and groom them well. Then he "doubled" over to the Camp Headquarters building.

Crook, with his new aide-de-camp, Lieutenant Ross, stood on the porch, regarding the approaching packer sternly.

"*Cargador*, that's no way to bring in a mule-train and you know it," he reproved.

"No, it haint," Hank admitted. "Seen Fray Luis, Gen'l?"

"No. Why, isn't he with you?"

"Heard from Prescott lately?"

"No, not a word. Why?"

"Plannin' a council with the Injuns here, be you?"

"I am. They asked for one. I was on my way over to the Agency, when I saw your train come in. But look here: How do you know about that?"

Generals are not accustomed to having their questions go unanswered. Hank, having let three go by, answered Crook's fourth question with gusto.

WORD HAD BEEN SENT that the General would be delayed in attending the council, but it was not much later than the appointed hour when the waiting Apaches saw him come striding toward them. He was accompanied by his aide, but by no other soldiers. An escort of troops would have been a sign of distrust and apprehension. The conspirators had counted on the fact that it was not Crook's way to show either emotion.

But strolling up carelessly came a dozen packers. Being civilians, not soldiers, they carried no rifles or carbines. Not noticeable, since knives were a regular part of their garb, were the knives at their belts and the heavy .45's holstered or tucked into their waistbands. Neither was it observed by preoccupied Indians that every knife was loose in its sheath and every revolver was at full cock. Hank, Tobias, and the rest even managed to conceal the gleams of anticipation in their eyes.

Crook gravely greeted the Apaches who replied in kind. Beady black eyes darted sharp looks, but saw nothing suspicious. Without hesitation they formed the council circle when the General took his seat—one chief to his right and another to his left, with Indians and whites alternating around the circle, as was customary. Only Lieutenant Ross sat outside the circle. As the General's aide, he stationed himself close behind his superior and a little to his right.

Ross was tense and tortured with misgivings. Nothing he could say had dissuaded the General from the folly of coming to this council where he knew a deliberate attempt would be made to murder him. His life was too valuable to risk this way; too much depended on him! Yet Crook had silenced Ross with an assurance that he and the packers would be able to handle the situation and that this was the best way to unmask and break up the rebel element in the tribe.

With responsibility for the General's safety heavy on him, the aide watched every move. There was an unreal quality about this scene; it was like the performance of a play whose script he had read. The stage was set, the curtain up, the action about to begin. And he, Ross, knew in advance what would happen next.

Or did he? What if details of the plot had been changed?

Hank the Yank sat beside an Indian almost as tall as he. The husky blacksmith Tobias, probably by design, had seated himself next to a powerful muscular Apache. Both, paying little heed to the talk which had begun, were turning over in their minds a bit of news they picked up. Gomez and his train had gone through

Date Creek only yesterday. Had he known anything of this plot? In any event, he had given no warning.

Ross noted that each Indian flanking Crook had laid his carbine carelessly across his knees. Which one had been chosen to assassinate the General? It would be hard to cover them both. He would have to move fast to handle even one. Under necessity of making a choice, Ross fixed on the brave at Crook's right; the muzzle of his weapon lay toward the left, in the General's direction, and would need scarcely any shift to be aimed and fired—while the other Indian's gun, also lying toward the left, would have to be swung around through a half circle. Ross inched a little farther to the right.

The talk proceeded agreeably and without argument. "According to the script," thought Ross—and now it was about time for the death signal.

Across the circle, the tall Apache next to Hank spoke up suddenly.

"Talk good," he grunted. "Better if smoke."

He took a pinch of tobacco from his pocket, rolled a cigarette, and lit it. Before the first puff of smoke had passed his lips, a shot crashed; the warrior on Crook's right had leveled his carbine straight at the General and fired.

Lieutenant Ross, like a coiled spring released, threw himself forward and struck up the arm of the would-be assassin.

The bullet whistled over the General's head.

The council circle disintegrated into a mêlée as every packer jumped the Apache on his right. Shots, shouts and groans echoed. The tough American mule-skinner, veterans of numerous brawls and battles, grappled with their adversaries, choking and gouging. Reddened blades were token of the dexterous knife-work of the Spanish-Americans. One warrior staggered up to his feet and ran. He did not go far; Chileno's knife was sunk deep in his neck.

The tall Apache who had given the signal had been caught from behind by Hank. With a long arm clamping his windpipe and a knee in his back, he kicked and bit in vain. Finally he went limp. The victor was hauling him off to the guardhouse when he suddenly revived, wrenched loose, and slashed with his hunting-knife. Hank kicked it out of his hand. Quick as a cat, the big *cargador* stepped in, grabbed the Apache by both ears and pounded the savage's head against a rock till he was still.

Tobias and his big opponent fought like wrestling bears. They clutched each other, straining for a better hold. With the Indian tearing at his hair and ears, the blacksmith wound his arms around the other's torso. They tightened like the jaws of a vise. One after another, the Apache's ribs cracked.

Survivors broke through the packers' thin lines. Before the cavalry could head them off, they escaped into the mountains.

GENERAL CROOK LAID DOWN a captured Apache carbine he had been using to good effect. He shook hands with and thanked in turn Lieutenant Ross, Hank, and every packer.

As he finished two cavalymen from Fort Whipple galloped up on lathered, exhausted horses. The leader, a grizzled sergeant, surveyed the carnage with consternation. Then as he caught sight of General Crook, safe and unharmed, his face brightened and he slid from his saddle to salute.

"Thin it's not kil't yez are, sor!" he exclaimed in relief. "I was thinkin' we was too late. That Mr. Luis, he sez—"

"I know," Crook interrupted. "By good luck these packers had warned me, and we took care of things. But you made a fine ride—and I thank you."

"'Tis a quare thing, sor," the Sergeant said in a lowered voice, "but on the way here we met Packmaster

Gomez an' his train." He told us the Gin'ral had left Date Creek, ridin' east. "No use killin' yer hosses," sez he. "The Gin'ral's safe and far away from that place by now." But I had me orders, an' we come on through."

"Good. Thanks, Sergeant, and don't tell anyone what you've just told me."

"No, sor. But should I be matin' this Mr. Gomez—"

"You will leave him to me," said Crook authoritatively.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN



STRANGE sense that all this had happened before lay on Stephen Flint as at last the Army took the field for the campaign. Bourke's tales, vivid in his mind, blended this martial scene with a similar one more than three centuries past. Through his half-closed eyes the lad could see the armored *conquistadores* of Spain in the place of the blue-clad cavalry and infantry. The bearded Crook became the bearded Coronado marching in search of the Seven Golden Cities of Cibola. Fray Luis, in spirit and almost in image, seemed one of the valiant Franciscan friars of that expedition of long ago. Even more striking than such parallels was the fact that the enemy was the same in this year of 1872 as he had been in 1541—the Apache.

General Crook had elected a winter campaign. It would be bitterly cold in the heights. The Apaches in their thin clothing would suffer when they sought their customary refuge in the mountain ranges and lofty plateaus. When they lighted fires to warm themselves, smoke or pinpoints of flame would betray them to pursuing troops, guided by keen-eyed Indian scouts.

The thrill of high adventure tingled in Stephen's blood. He already had seen some fighting, but this would be the real thing. He had not yet learned that war is only about one-tenth stirring action and nine-tenths bitter hardship and utter weariness.

They marched hard and fast, bound from Fort Whipple to Camp Apache, a two-hundred-and-fifty-mile journey. They turned out at two in the morning, broke ice on creek or spring to reach water. They were on the road by four o'clock, and there were none but brief halts, until late in the afternoon.

When Camp Apache was reached, there was another hundred miles to go over steep and rocky ground, cut by cañons and the trails made hazardous by loose stones. Once, delayed by those cañons cutting their route, they marched for twenty-six hours to regain the lost time. Every trooper and packer, except those on guard duty, lariatd his animal, picketed it on grass and flung himself down to sleep—exhausted, head pillowed on his saddle—all but General Crook. That iron man took his shotgun and went out hunting.

Pack-train "A" halted at old Camp Grant. This would be the base of operations for the troops it would serve. Among them, Stephen was delighted to learn, was the cavalry command to which Lieutenant Bourke was attached. That officer took time to explain the plan of campaign to his young friend.

"We're going to sweep the Tonto Basin," he declared. "The Apaches have holed up there in those mountains long enough. This time they're not going to be able to dodge us. The General has stripped all the Army posts of just about every officer and man not on the sick list. He's formed a number of columns like this one of ours. They'll converge on the center of the Basin and scour it until the last hostile has been destroyed or has surrendered."

"Each column will have its detachment of Indian scouts and its pack-train. The General has passed the word that no excuse will be accepted for leaving a trail. If our horses play out, we're to follow the enemy on foot."

No small scouts and skirmishes, in *this campaign!* The Apache is going to get all the fighting he wants and in one stiff dose."

Stephen, remembering the great battles of the Civil War, fought during his boyhood, realized that this campaign was small-scale in comparison. But it would be no less hard-fought. Troops from famous regiments would march out from the posts: men of the Twenty-first and Twenty-third Infantry, of the First, Third, and Fifth Cavalry. They would be guided by Indian scouts, loyal to the white man whose salt they ate, proud of the uniform as any soldier who wore it, ready to serve against other tribes of their own race for the sake of the chase and a good fight. Their pack-trains must not fail them. Nor would they unless—

As if answering Stephen's unspoken thought, Fray Luis, riding up on Proverbio, announced:

"I am told that Señor Gomez is in ill health and will not lead his train on this campaign."

"Aha!" Bourke exclaimed. "The going was getting a little rough for him."

"He who sows brambles must not go barefoot," Proverbio supplied—via Fray Luis.

"Proverbially true," Bourke agreed. "But did Gomez resign? I did not expect him to do that on the eve of a campaign. That would look too bad for him."

"No, he did not resign," Fray Luis continued. "The General accepted his suggestion that he start a mule replacement depot. We are certain to be losing some animals in this campaign."

"Where'll the depot be?"

"Tucson."

"Right where he can go on working with the Indian Ring!" Stephen snorted indignantly. "I don't see why the General—"

Bourke cut him short. "Figure it out, Steve! Our fat friend is better there than trying his tricks on some column in the field. Also there's a proverb—if I can beat Proverbio to it—to the effect that if you give a rascal enough rope he'll hang himself. What do you think, Fray Luis? Isn't it safer to have Gomez there?"

Fray Luis seemed reluctant to commit himself, to cast any doubt on the wisdom of any action by his friend the General. Finally he threw his voice, letting his mule speak for him:

"He who is silent," declares a proverb of Spain, 'does not say nothing.'"

"Nearly parried, *Señor Patrón*," Lieutenant Bourke conceded with a grin. "Well, we shall see."

THE TRUMPETS SUMMONED; the column marched.

When a man marches toward battle or fares forth on any other dangerous venture, Stephen thought to himself, he is lucky if he is part of a gallant company, bravely and ably commanded. For however unsure he may feel of himself, he partakes of a communion of courage and of confidence that he will not fail his comrades or himself.

His affectionate gaze dwelt on the straight back of his idol, Fray Luis, at the head of the pack-train, and on his tried friends, Hank, Tobias, Chileno, and the rest. Yonder rode the column's veteran commander, Major Brown, a fine leader. The Major, Stephen remembered, had been a member of the board of inquiry which determined the ownership of Proverbio. There rode Bourke and Lieutenant Ross, who had saved Crook's life, and in the ranks a dozen or so cavalrymen with whom Stephen had made friends.

They marched through the foothills up into the heights of the Pinal range, where bitter winds whistled and the ground was deep with snow. Pressing onward, they descended into a valley where it was warm and the ground green with luscious grass. From one such extreme to another they passed and never halted long

enough to accustom themselves to either. They pushed on after the scout leading the way, the Apache Nantaje, called "Joe" by the troopers.

Somewhere in these mountains was a formidable Apache stronghold, Joe assured them. Soon, he insisted, they would find "heap Injun."

Close on the heels of the cavalry followed the pack-train. No delay would be caused by this train. Major Brown complimented Fray Luis on its performance. Stephen never ceased to marvel at the cleverness of the mules. They never failed to shelter themselves from wind or sun whenever possible. They always grazed uphill rather than down, to save bending. The train lost two mules only, animals a little less shrewd than their fellows, although the fate which overtook them could be called accidental rather than due to carelessness. One died from eating some of the poisonous insect called *niña de la tierra* (child of the soil) which clings to grass blades. Another was bitten on the lip by a rattlesnake. For a few days a poultice of golondrina weed seemed to be saving him, but then he died—becoming a feast, regardless of the cause of his demise, for the Indian scouts.

IT WAS CLOUDY THAT NIGHT, and fires could be safely permitted to cook the scouts' mule-meat and rations more appetizing to the other members of the command. Word was passed that the column was not far from its objective: a cave in the cañon of the Salt River, long a hidden stronghold of the Apaches. Well before dawn, the orders said, Major Brown would lead his men, dismounted, in a climb up to a point where an attack could be launched on the cave.

Meanwhile the present camp was made defensible in case of an emergency. Cargo and *aparejos* were built up into breastworks. Behind them a picket-line was stretched; the horses and mules would be tied there under cover from fire.

"Then the packers aren't going to get into the fight?" There was disappointment in Stephen's voice as he questioned Fray Luis while they sat by the fire.

"No, my son," was the answer. "Our duty is here."

"I know, but—" The lad fell silent.

Fray Luis surveyed him with understanding. "There is no need for you there," he said, "nor have you any longer a need of your own to go. You have proven yourself."

"You mean—"

"I mean that, knowing you will be afraid, you still dare go forth and face fear. And that—not simply nerveless insensibility to fear—is true courage."

"Thank you for your faith in me, sir. But there's still a fear that keeps—well, keeps kind of haunting me. I don't know whether I could stand up and face it or not. It's a fear I ran away from, when I jumped my ship and left the sea."

As if in a confessional, Stephen poured out his story. It was a story all too common in boyhood and youth—the story of a youngster's life being made miserable by a bully. The bully, stronger, larger and a few years older, was the third mate on the ship in which Stephen had served as supercargo. The mate had no authority over him and was careful to allow his superior officers to see none of the hazing and the crude, mean-spirited jokes he played on his victim. He persecuted the younger fellow for his own sadistic enjoyment and to amuse an element of his own type in the crew, for the mate liked an audience. Stephen, bitter and burning with resentment, had tried to force himself to stand up to and defy his tormentor. When he could not, his humiliation from his cowardice and the mate's taunting was more than he could endure. When the ship made port at Monterey, he had slipped away and begun that blind flight eastward which almost had ended in the dark cañon where the Apaches caught him.

The strong, comforting voice of Fray Luis broke in as the lad finished.

"It is done, Stephen. Such a man is not worth remembrance. You have redeemed yourself. The slate is clean."

But the lad's brow was still furrowed as he looked up to see Lieutenant Bourke leaning over them.

"A word with you, Fray Luis," the officer requested. "Excuse me, Steve."

Stephen could not help hearing what was said. Bourke wanted a volunteer to accompany his detachment in the attack tomorrow—someone he could send back for more ammunition if required. He did not want to spare one of his troopers from the firing-line.

Stephen stood up in front of them.

"I'm sorry, but I overheard," he said. "I want to go. Let me go, Fray Luis."

The former Franciscan nodded a trifle somberly.

"Go, my son—and go with God," he said. . . .

A certain star, watched for by the Apache scout, Nantaje, rose over the eastern horizon.

"Time we go," he told Major Brown.

"All right, Joe," the officer answered.

The order was given. Troopers tied up extra ammunition and rations in blankets, slung them over their shoulders. Chilled to the bone, they welcomed the climb to the lofty mesa inclosing the cañon, but no man dared even stamp his feet to warm them. "No talk above a whisper; if you have to cough, muffle your head in a blanket." Such were the strict orders. This attack must surprise and wipe out the enemy or the column would be hard pressed to fight its way out of the cañon. Joe had stressed that strongly.

Brown and his men scaled the heights and stared down over the mesa rim. Down in the cañon campfires blazed against the blackness. Entirely unsuspecting, Apache braves were feasting, singing and dancing.

Nantaje spoke in the Major's ear. Following his advice, Brown detached Ross and a dozen sharpshooters. Led by the scout, the little party took a perilous trail down the precipice, to cut off the hostiles' escape.

DAWN, BLEAK AND GRAY, seeped slowly through the darkness. Stephen, at Bourke's side, stared down into the dismal depths of the cañon. Bourke whispered:

"The Valley of the Shadow of Death!"

Stephen shivered. The description was too apt. He summoned to mind the reassuring words of the psalm so often recited by Fray Luis:

"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me. Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me."

The roar of a carbine volley shattered the silence. Ross' detachment was in action. The Major barked an order at Bourke to take the first forty men in the column and get down into the cañon at once.

Stephen never forgot that descent. If any man had slipped from the trail, his hurtling body would never have stopped until it crashed into the stream in the cañon-bed hundreds of feet below. But by good fortune all made it safely.

In the wall of the opposite cliff gaped a cave, its mouth protected by a natural barricade of huge boulders. The Apaches seen from above, just back from a raid, had been dancing on a shelf before it. There Ross' fire had caught them, and six of them would dance no more. Now all the band manned the cave ramparts and opened fire. But Bourke's forty carbines spat a hail of lead at them until Brown and the rest of the command had made the descent and taken cover.

There were women and children in that cave. Twice the Major through an interpreter urged the Apaches to surrender or at least allow their women and children to come out, promising them kind treatment. Yells of

*Illustrated
by Herbert
Morton Stoops*



"God sends nothing but what can be borne."

derision and defiance were his answer. The warriors, their squaws loading for them, would fight to the finish. Saving ammunition, they launched arrows in high arcs on the soldiers in the valley.

It was lighter now; from the rocks where he and Bourke had taken cover, Stephen saw that a semicircular skirmish-line had invested the cave's mouth, a line formed by both cavalymen and Indian scouts and—yes, by packers. Hank and Tobias grinned over at him. Those two could never be kept out of a fight!

A Pima scout in the line exposed himself for a second. An Apache bullet plowed into his chest, and he was dead before he could cry out. Off on the right flank an Apache warrior tried to slip away to bring aid. A quick shot by a troop blacksmith dropped him in his tracks.

There would be no taking that cave stronghold by frontal assault—not without paying a terrible toll. That, Major Brown saw clearly. The order he passed along the skirmish line was: "Fire at the cave roof."

The carbines cracked. Glancing from the granite of the cave roof, the bullets plunged down into the crowded interior. Shrieks and wails testified to the deadly effect of the fire.

"Cease firing!"

Once more Brown urged surrender. The silence that succeeded was suddenly broken by a weird, blood-curdling chant. Along the blue lines in the cañon-bed, Indian scouts passed excited warning:

"Look out! There goes the death song. They're going to charge!"

Stephen saw the red-banded heads of Apache warriors looming over the barricade—saw them pour a plunging fire down on their foe. Lead spattered wickedly on his cover, and particles of rock stung his cheek. The Apaches came leaping down in a heroic, headlong charge straight toward his position.

MOVING AUTOMATICALLY, THE LAD found himself rushing out with Bourke and the soldiers around them, to meet that charge.

Shots and clubbed carbines and flashing knives. The shock of body on body. Stephen found gleaming black eyes staring into his. Red hands reached for his throat. So coolly that it seemed to him to be someone else acting, the youthful packer pressed his heavy revolver against the stomach of his assailant and fired twice. The Indian slid down at his feet.

Only two or three braves escaped from that brief, fierce mêlée to dart back to the cave. Stephen was back

under cover again when the voice of Lieutenant Bourke broke into his consciousness:

"The Major's signaled we'll be needing more ammunition. Don't waste any time getting up that trail. Good luck." He gave the messenger an affectionate hand-clasp and a glance that could not disguise his anxiety.

Stephen sprinted from rock to rock. Reaching the bottom of the trail up the cañon side, he waited to catch his breath, then began his scrambling climb. The skirmish-line had redoubled its fire to cover him, but as he climbed higher Apache marksmen in the cave across the valley could see him better, and bullets like angry wasps pursued him vengefully.

To stand fire when you can shoot back in one matter. To be shot at when you cannot retaliate is another, as every hunted thing must know. Stephen's heart pounded; his breath came in painful gasps. At long last he swung himself up over the rim, and lay there panting.

He dared not spare much time to recover his wind. They would be needing that ammunition. He struggled to his feet and drove himself back toward the camp.

Fray Luis had Proverbio ready, packed with a cargo of ammunition.

Stephen protested: "It's pretty hot back there. Let me take another mule. You're fond of Proverbio."

"And of you, my son," said the tall gray man. "Go."

Together they ran the gantlet of fire, the lad and the mule. The Apache marksmen across the cañon never doubted that the animal's cargo was badly needed ammunition. If they could help it, it would never reach the troops that had them bottled up. They opened rapid fire with their repeating rifles; the eerie screech and ping of bullets beat against Stephen's ears. Lead spattered against the trail wall a foot ahead of him.

He could not crouch and scramble as he had while climbing up. On this steep descent he must pick his way carefully and keep a steady hand on the tie-rope, or both he and Proverbio would go over the edge. How hard his pulse was hammering! He kept thinking: "I must not let Proverbio feel how unsteady I am. If he gets panicky, we're both gone."

Such worry was vain. Proverbio displayed the coolness under fire of a veteran. Ignoring the bullets, he watched his footing with the utmost care; he planted each hoof with delicate precision. The tendons in his sturdy forelegs stood out under the downward thrust of the heavy cargo. Strong haunches were braced against the pressure of the crupper.

Heavy fire by the troopers covered them. At last the seemingly interminable descent was over. Stephen found Hank and Tobias beside him, guiding him and Proverbio under cover. They slapped him on the back approvingly, and hastened to unpack the ammunition.

STEPHEN GLANCED UP TO DESCRIBE another detachment of troops which had come up on the opposite side of the cañon. From a point directly above the cave, they were rolling great boulders over the edge. The stones were smashing on the shelf, filling the cave with flying fragments, demolishing the rampart. That terrible stone-bombing ended the battle.

Firing ceased. Few except women and children and not all of them had escaped from the dreadful carnage in the cave. Not many more such effective blows would be needed to bring the war to an effective conclusion.

Major Ross strode up to shake Stephen's hand.

"If you weren't a civilian, I'd put you in for a Medal of Honor," he declared. "By the way, did you ever think of going to West Point? I'll speak to the General; he might get an appointment for you."

"Thanks a lot, sir," Stephen replied. "I'd certainly like to consider it. But Proverbio here deserves most of the credit. He was the steady one, coming down that trail."

"All right," Ross retorted with a grin. "I'll recommend him for West Point too. Horseback riding's taught at the Academy, but the average officer never learns much about packing and mule-skinning in general till he gets out in the field. It's time the Point had a model, and the Army a mascot. Couldn't have a better one than the mule!"

CHAPTER NINETEEN



THROUGH the Tonto Basin they harried the Apache, allowing him no rest, running him down in his last refuges. When the hostiles doubled and turned to elude one force, another of Crook's converging columns would cut the trail and take it up.

The fugitives dared not halt to bake mescal or to light fires to warm themselves. Pursuit, guided by keen-eyed Indian scouts and pressed by commands where every man and animal was strong and fit, was relentless and untiring. Through the bitter cold of the mountains, the splendid pack-trains followed close after their battalions.

Apache bands still broke through the cordons to raid the settlements and rob the ranchos, to steal and kill cattle and horses, to torture prisoners to death. But such occurrences were rare now. Punishment had become swift and sure. It only remained to catch and crush the few remaining bands raiding from two fastnesses—Superstition Mountain and Turret Butte.

Crook was preparing for a final drive with his fast-moving, mobile columns when an ally came to the aid of the Apaches—an ally possessing crippling power.

Fray Luis, wise in the lore of animals, was the first to detect it.

Several mules on his picket-line were sick. Their heads and long ears drooped, and there was a discharge from their eyes and nostrils. The poor beasts looked up at him with a lackluster gaze.

The *patrón* issued rapid orders to his packers. "Take those animals and any others that look sick, picket them apart and do not work them," he directed.

He hastened to report to Major Brown. That officer, alarmed, hurried with him to make an inspection of the mules—more already were obviously ailing—and then of the horse lines, unfortunately not far from the mules. The disease, whatever it was, was there too. Brown ordered isolation of the ailing animals, as had the pack-master. But they looked at each other and shook their heads, virtually certain that they were too late. The sickness had spread too rapidly to justify much confidence in such measures to curb it.

Major Brown, writing a dispatch to be rushed to General Crook, looked up to remark to Fray Luis and his staff:

"This thing may knock out the whole campaign, if it spreads. We'll have a tough time catching Apaches—with every troop-horse and pack-mule in the command on the sick list! I'm requesting the General to send us a veterinary as soon as possible. Got any idea what this sickness is, Fray Luis?"

"No definite one, Major," the *patrón* responded. "I have never before seen horses and mules with this affliction. But I have seen dogs with its like. With them it is called distemper."

"Then it's no mild matter," Brown observed, frowning. "Can we use the animals?"

"We can try. But I think you will find that they are not capable of much effort. If you want them to recover, they must have rest."

The Major, still frowning deeply, mused: "Wonder where the animals get that confounded disease? Things like that are more apt to get started while on a post. But we've been in the field for weeks."

Lieutenant Bourke asked suddenly: "Fray Luis, that last detail that joined us brought several mule replacements. Are any of them sick?"

"It was one of them that seemed sickest," the pack-master admitted, plainly with reluctance.

"Major, I'm going to speak out," Bourke snapped. "Fray Luis hates to accuse anyone and won't make trouble for anyone unless it can't be helped. I have no such scruples!"

"Now, sir, those new mules came from Tucson—from the corral run by Packmaster Gomez. And it's high time to come right out flat and state that Gomez is a dirty, double-dealing Indian Ringer who'll stop at nothing."

Fray Luis spoke in mild reproof. "Lieutenant, the mules might not have shown any signs of sickness when Gomez sent them out."

"You've got nothing but suspicions, Bourke," Major Brown seconded. "My sentiments toward Gomez and the Ring are the same as yours, but you have to have proof."

"Add up the damning facts against that fat fiend and they'll point straight to his guilt," Bourke declared hotly. "Would they?" Brown persisted. "In court?"

Bourke was reduced to fuming silence. After all, there was no absolute evidence so far. Nor had there ever been. Gomez was too shrewd to furnish any.

A sentry on a rise of ground challenged. He passed an oncoming horseman who, sighting Major Brown, trotted up to the group.

"The veterinary!" Brown exclaimed. "Doc, I only just sent a galloper off to the General, asking for you."

"Met him back a ways and let him go on with your report," the veterinary explained. "The General started me making the rounds of the columns in the field a week ago. They're all in plenty of trouble."

His glance ran along the line of picketed horses. He nodded his head in gloomy confirmation.

"You've got it here too," he diagnosed.

The disease, the veterinary stated, was a type of influenza which had made its appearance in the United States some months ago and spread rapidly. Fortunately it had not reached Arizona when the campaign began.

"If this thing did appear," the vet continued, "I'd fixed it so the columns in the field would be quarantined against it. I asked the General to leave positive orders that no horse or mule replacements would be sent out to us, if there was any sign of sickness at all."

MOROSELY HE BIT A HUNK from a plug of chewing-tobacco and stowed it in his cheek.

"Good plan, but it didn't work," he went on. "Now you're going to have to do some foot-slogging if you want to keep chasing Apaches. No, you can't ride. Most of these animals will come down with it. Some'll die. The rest'll be no good to you till they get over it. I'll do what little I can, but it won't be much."

Bourke said: "Doc, we just got some mule replacements here."

"So did the other outfits," the vet answered. "That's what brought this influenza."

"They all came from the Government corral at Tucson," Bourke hammered out the point.

"Run by a man named Gomez," the veterinary put in. "Know him? The General's sent for him to ask him some kind-of-pointed questions."

"Aha!" Bourke snorted triumphantly. "But I'll bet a month's pay Gomez won't come."

There is a pathetic quality about sick animals. All who love them are wrong by it. The suffering of dumb beasts draws deeper on human sympathy sometimes than that of fellow-men. Hank and Tobias, tending the sick mules of the train, could not pretend they were unaffected.

"Mean and stubborn and jest plain ornery—that's mules, like as not," Tobias remarked gruffly. "But when

they're ailin' like this, you can't help feelin' sorry for 'em."

"Might be 'cause they cahn't complain," Hank observed. "You could ask 'em, 'How be you?' but they cahn't tell you. Naow sick folks like to be asked frequent, so's they can complain and feel a hull lot better. I remember onct that girl thet's a-waitin' for me back in New Hampshire was took sick. I told her it wa'n't nothing much, and jest to forget it. Tuhned out to be a spell of pneumony. She up and got angry at me; for a long time she acted right shoht to'ds me."

ALL EFFORTS TO HALT THE SPREAD of the disease among the pack-mules and the cavalry mounts were futile. As the veterinary had foretold, little could be done but allow it to run its course. Meanwhile Brown's column, like all the rest, was immobilized. The only ray of comfort was that the influenza had not yet attacked a few of the officers' chargers nor the riding-mules which had been picketed apart.

Many times a day Fray Luis and Stephen found occasion to look over Proverbio and the hinny. Neither of those trusty animals had succumbed, but still remained in the best of health. Their riders made much of them. Even more often than usual Fray Luis engaged in the pretended conversations with his mule. Proverbio seemed to enjoy them as much as he, and Stephen listened with amusement.

"We are fortunate in having these two," said the tall *patrón*. "There is a Spanish or more properly a Basque saying—"

"When one is Basque and a good Christian and has two mules, he needs no more," Proverbio supplied.

"Thank you, Brother Mule, that was the one," the former Franciscan answered. "Well, we shall have need of you two, with all the rest of my fine train fallen sick—some perhaps dying."

Stephen spoke up angrily. "Fray Luis, that was the work of Gomez and you know it."

The eyes of Fray Luis flamed. His benign countenance set in hard lines. Half to himself, he murmured: "A man so cruel that for his own evil ends he will deliberately spread a disease among innocent animals—"

"Does not deserve to live," Stephen finished for him, clenching his fists.

His chief gently shook his head and said quietly:

"My son, vengeance is not ours."

Crook was not halting his campaign even though the resources of all his Department in horses and mules were crippled. Orders came to the columns: "Pack your rations, ammunition and blankets on your own backs. Take the trail and hang onto it till the last of the hostile Apaches are killed off, or surrender."

So they marched—dismounted cavalry, accustomed infantry, and as many volunteer packers as could be spared from caring for the sick animals. The few horses and mules remaining healthy were used for the vital courier service. It was a dangerous detail, for it took lone riders through country ideal for an Apache ambush.

Stephen volunteered for that assignment and rode it on his hinny. Nor could Fray Luis be prevented from riding courier, using Proverbio. Despite his years, he made one strenuous and perilous trip after another. He knew well how to conserve his energy and he was wise in the ways of Indians.

Stephen rode in one day with news of Major Randall's gallant assault on Turret Butte. In the dead of night he had led his men up the face of the mountain, and at dawn charged down on the surprised Apache band. Numbers of the warriors had been so panic-stricken they had jumped down the precipice and had been dashed to death.

Lieutenant Bourke listened to the news with grim satisfaction.

"Now we only have to clean up the bunch here on Superstition Mountain," he said. "I think they're about ready to come in and give up without a fight. Do you realize what that will mean, Steve? We'll have won a war that began back in the time of Cortez. We'll have conquered a fierce people who have been the scourge of two great nations for two centuries—the Apaches."

"But there's still a private war of ours to be finished," Stephen declared.

Bourke's triumphant mood sobered.

"Right," he said. "Gomez. By the way, I guess you hadn't heard. I won my bet that he'd skip."

"Then he never reported to General Crook?"

"Not he! The Indian Ring spirited him away. He'd done his dirty work for 'em and done it up proper. But we fooled 'em, after all. They fixed our animals, but we're winning this campaign on foot."

"Where's Gomez gone?"

"By now he must be over the Border—safe in Mexico."

BUT PABLO GOMEZ HAD NOT followed the safe and cautious course which might have been expected of him. Up to a point he had gone through with all the smooth arrangements made for him by his friends in the Indian Ring. Disguised as a prospector, riding a good horse and leading a pack-mule, he had slipped out of Tucson well ahead of the inevitable investigation of the corral full of diseased animals which had been under his charge. He had been gone hours before Crook's summons arrived.

But instead of heading for the safety of Mexico as fast as he could travel, he had chanced a side trip. It was folly, and he knew it, yet a gnawing urge within him compelled it. He could not bear to leave behind him a certain unsettled account.

The stout man had not long hesitated. For the sake of the revenge he craved, he was ready and willing to risk his own skin. Besides, it was probable he could count on help. Decision made, he turned his horse off the trail south and headed toward Superstition Mountain. Anticipating the deed he planned and its infinite satisfaction, he licked his thick lips and spurred his mount on faster.

When Gomez rode into the midst of a small band of Apaches at the mountain's base, he was not surprised or alarmed. He had in fact been looking for just such a party. Quickly he spoke to them in their own tongue and they lowered their rifles. One brave recognized him as a former Apache captive and as a go-between for the Indian Ring and renegade Apaches in various shady dealings. They sat down to smoke together in amity.

They would have to surrender soon to the soldiers, they told Gomez. There was no chance of fighting on.

But, Gomez persuaded, could not his brothers still manage a small service for him? He would, of course, pay well. There was whisky—and other presents—for them in his pack and more across the Border where some of these warriors might care to accompany him rather than live in captivity on the Arizona reservation.

The persuasions and inducements offered by Señor Gomez proved highly effective.

Fray Luis rode Proverbio up a trail on Superstition Mountain toward Major Brown's encampment. It was not far from dusk and he urged his mule to his best paces. There would be a moon tonight, but even so the tree-shadowed trail would be dark. It would be best to complete as much of the ride as possible before nightfall.

The one-time friar was happy. He knew that the mountain bands had made overtures for surrender. General Crook's dispatches, which he carried, directed that surrender be accepted and the Apaches brought in and settled on a reservation. Soon might begin the civilizing process, the redemption of these savages, for which he had hoped and prayed so long. The promise of the Word flooded through his mind:

"And they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more."

Now it was darkening, and the moon had still to rise. The trail, though faint, could still be followed. On a fairly level stretch Proverbio took up a trot without urging. He knew by the pressure of thighs on his barrel that his master was in haste to arrive, and he was eager for the feed of grain awaiting him at camp.

The trap was cunningly set. None could have marked it in that dim light. Proverbio, moving at a fast trot, was on its very brink before he was aware of it.

A pitfall dug across a trail was not a usual Apache device. That was the guile of Gomez. It had been cleverly covered over with boughs and earth.

The mule's rapid and intelligent reaction was a marvel. He knew he could not stop himself. It was too late for that. And an attempt at too abrupt a halt might pitch Fray Luis, fine rider though he was, over his head into the yawning pit. In a split second Proverbio gathered himself and even as he began to topple into the pit he made a mighty leap to cross it.

But Gomez had thought of that possibility. He and his Apaches had dug the pit wide.

Proverbio's jump fell short. He struck his head against the farther side of the pit. Its blackness swallowed mule and rider. A heavy thud resounded as they struck the bottom. Then there was silence. In the depths was no stir, no movement.

After a minute Gomez and his friends came quietly out of their ambush. They stared down into the pit at the still forms of the man and the animal. They were not dead; they were seen to be breathing.

"Ah!" sighed the fat one in satisfaction. Moonlight glistened on the white of his teeth, bared in a grin. He was to have the opportunity of putting a pleasantly personal period to this affair!

He told the Apaches to go back to the horses, ready for the ride to the Border, and wait for him. They agreed, but insisted he make haste. They could not wait long. A soldier patrol might come down the trail at any time.

"Not long," Gomez promised. As he waved them away, he grinned again, drew his finger across his throat and climbed down into the pit.

He looked down on the recumbent mule and ground his teeth. Almost was he on the point of viciously kicking the hated animal in the head. Grudging caution halted him: Leave well enough alone—the beast was not yet dead and might revive. Probably one or more of his legs had been broken in the fall. Whoever found him in the pit—if anyone did before he died of thirst or exposure—would have to shoot him.

GOMEZ STEPPED GINGERLY over Proverbio to reach his master. His long knife slithered out of its sheath as he bent over the inert Fray Luis. With his left hand he pushed upward on the older man's chin to draw the skin of the throat taut. His knife hand moved downward and leftward for a neat back-hand slash.

But the knife stayed poised, the stroke unmade. Gomez muttered to himself. This way his enemy, unconscious, would never know who killed him. Most of the satisfaction would be lost. The fat man unstoppered his canteen and flung the cold water on his victim's face.

Fray Luis gasped and opened his eyes. Now Gomez knelt on his chest and leaned close over him to be certain he was recognized. He made an odd purring sound and flashed up the long knife. A ray of moonlight filtered through the boughs to glint on its steel.

And still he hesitated, dissatisfied. Fray Luis gazed up at him steadily, unwaveringly, unafraid in the presence of death.

A snarl of exasperation rasped from the killer. He swung his knife for the slash.

Gomez had not noticed that the long head of the prostrate mule had lifted and turned toward him. Proverbio, staring back over his haunches, instantly recognized his ancient foe. His ears flattened back; just as he lay, the mule lashed out with one hindleg.

An iron-shod hoof caught Gomez in the side of the head. The stillness of the night was punctuated by a sound unforgettable to those who ever have heard it—the half-sharp, half-muffled *plop* of a skull crushed by a heavy blow.

Up the trail sounded the tramp of a troop patrol. Fray Luis called out.

CHAPTER TWENTY



STEPHEN FLINT, sharing his friend Lieutenant Bourke's quarters at Camp Lowell, drew on his new short jacket with the silver buttons. The flare to his trouser-legs and the flat sombrero, like that of Fray Luis, gave him the look of a dashing young *caballero*. In the small cracked mirror on the wall he regarded his image with distinct approval.

Bourke, sauntering in, caught him at it.

"Not bad, Señor Esteban!" the officer remarked with a grin. "Must be going to call on somebody in Tucson. Well, success to you. As the poet puts it: 'Peace hath her victories no less renowned than war.'"

Stephen, reddening, turned the subject.

"General Crook's winning those victories right now," he said. "That's grand work he's doing with the Apaches. He's really giving them a chance to raise cattle and farm and make their own way."

"You bet he is. The other day I saw a whole tribe digging an irrigation ditch. Those who had no tools were using sharpened sticks. They're taking the hand the General has held out to them. I've heard him pounding away at that slogan of his: 'Exact and even-handed justice to red man and to white alike.' He'll hammer away until he gets education and then citizenship for them—if he isn't stopped."

"What might stop him?"

"Two things. For one, there's a big campaign coming up North, against the Sioux and Cheyennes. It's pretty certain the General, after his fine campaign against the Apaches, will be ordered up there. But if he goes, he'll leave able officers here to carry on his work."

"Then what would the trouble be?"

"The Indian Ring hasn't given up, my friend! We've rocked 'em back on their haunches, but their graft is too good to let go without a struggle. They're keeping the wires hot to Washington and they've got powerful friends there. But we'll block 'em as we have before. . . . That's enough now. Ride on into town. It's not polite to keep a lady waiting."

Stephen rode the hinny toward Tucson. His pulses beat fast as he thought of seeing Carmelita. How lovely she was! She was young and maybe she would wait for him until he had made his way in the world. Major Brown had spoken to the General about an appointment to West Point for him, and the General was doing his best to obtain it. The Army offered neither wealth nor ease, but serving your country was a fine and honorable career. And Stephen had heard that though it took plenty of skimping you could support a wife on a second lieutenant's pay—if she were the right wife.

As he rode through the plaza and toward the Casa Perez, Stephen noticed that a prospecting-party was preparing to set out, now that the Apaches were quiet. Its objective was probably one of the lost silver mines which continued to draw treasure-seekers.

One of the prospectors was walking down the street ahead of him, walking with a rolling gait. There was something familiar about that figure. As the hinny drew up even, Stephen looked closely.

His heart sank. This meeting, he had long felt, was bound some day to come—a thing fated, a thing inevitable. Here was the bucko mate of his ship, the bully he had run away from that day which now seemed so long ago.

The man's recognition was simultaneous.

"Well, if it aint our long-lost supercargol!" he roared. "So this is where you run to! Blast me, if you don't look purty and prosperous. Guess you was right to jump ship, Soupy. Follow the sea and you die poor. You must 'a' struck some of the silver hereabouts. How 'bout chartin' a course for me?"

Stephen dismounted, let the hinny go free and forced himself to walk over and face the man.

"No hard feelin's," said the mate. "Shake, Soupy!"

"No, Jabe," Stephen refused. "I won't shake hands with you."

"Esteban!"

Carmelita had come up at this most inopportune of moments. Her dark eyes were shining with delight at seeing him again. Behind her stood Tia Teresa and Fray Luis.

Gravely Stephen took the girl's outstretched hands in his, bent low over them and kissed them.

"Now aint that cute!" the mate mocked, chortling.

"Me, I can do a hull lot better'n kissin' her hands! Interdoce me, Soupy. That's as purty a little Mexican puss as I ever seen." There was an admiring leer on his ugly face.

"Clear out, you!" Stephen ordered in a quiet voice.

"Listen to him!" Jabe bellowed. "Him givin' me orders! You be good, Soupy, or I'll swab the deck with you, like I useter."

It was now or never, Stephen knew. The old accustomed fear clutched at his heart with an icy grip. His throat was so dry he could hardly swallow, but he managed to rasp out:

"Put up your fists."

Then he walked over toward his enemy. With all his strength he hit the man, a head taller and thirty pounds heavier, square in the jaw.

"Ouch!" the mate exclaimed in both pain and surprise, and staggered back, rubbing his chin.

Then with a roar of wrath he charged, arms flailing.

IN FORMER DAYS, aboard ship, there would have been little to such an encounter, had Stephen then had the courage to put up any resistance. But now it was a real fight. Outweighed and outreached though he was, Stephen had been hardened by the tough campaigning. And he fought with furious gallantry. His best girl and the man who was his idol were watching.

The lad punched hard. Most of the haymakers the mate swung at him, he ducked or dodged. An expression of amazed chagrin on Jabe's face turned to one of angry exasperation. This despised kid was showing him up! He bored in, shortening his swings, jabbing. He was a practiced barroom brawler.

There could be only one end to it with the odds what they were. A crashing right floored Stephen. He got up, blood running from a corner of his mouth. Again he flung himself at the hated, burly figure. The blow that knocked him down a second time closed one eye. He struggled up and fought on. For the third time the mate's smashing right toppled him over. This time he lay still.

"Count him out," Jabe crowed.

"No!" Stephen heard himself shout.

He tried to drag himself up once more, but he could get no farther than to his hands and knees. There he

swayed, striving with his last strength to get up and fight on.

The mate stared down with amazement.

"Don't that young fool know when he's licked?" he demanded.

"No, he does not and he never will," Fray Luis answered for him, and his voice rang with affectionate pride.

The tall gray man lifted the lad in his arms. Carmelita, tears glistening bright in her eyes, stunched the flow from his bleeding mouth with her handkerchief.

"Home with him, Fray Luis," Tia Teresa urged.

The mate sneered at the tableau. He rubbed his bruised knuckles and turned to go.

Two big men barred his way.

"He's mine," Tobias claimed.

"Aw, let me hev him, Toby," Hank the Yank begged.

"We tossed for him and I won," the blacksmith insisted. He advanced on the mate, big fists clenched.

"This saint fair," whined the bully. "You're a lot bigger'n me."

"Bigger'n Steve, wa'n't you?" said Hank. "Blow him down, Toby!"

Even after Stephen was carried into the Casa Perez, smacks, thuds and yells for mercy could still be heard from out in the street.

GENERAL CROOK WALKED THROUGH Camp Lowell. His bushy sidewhiskers jutted out with justifiable pride. All was going as well as could be expected, with his efforts to make the Apaches self-supporting, self-respecting citizens. It would take time and there might be setbacks, but a good beginning had been made.

He would leave other accomplishments behind him. He was stringing a network of telegraph lines across Arizona. This camp and other Army posts were far healthier and more habitable because of the work he had caused to be done on them. Some sickly posts he had abolished; he had moved others to better locations.

Turning in at the Pack-train "A" area, he found the man he was seeking.

"Luis," he said. "I'm ordered North, for a winter campaign against the Sioux and Cheyennes. Will you come with me and lead your train?"

"Forgive me, my old friend," Fray Luis answered. "I had thought never to refuse you, but I feel my years at last. I could not withstand the rigors of a Northern winter."

"I understand, Luis. What will you do?"

"My work here is done. I will go to California, where Franciscan missions still flourish, and seek admission to my old Order."

"Right and fitting," Crook approved. "But I shall never find your equal as a packmaster. Will you turn your train over to Hank?"

"Yes, General. He, Tobias, and the rest, will never leave you."

Stephen was walking by. He brought his right hand to salute above the eye still battered from the fight.

"And you, young Flint," the General called. "Will you campaign with me again?"

"Yes sir," Stephen replied eagerly.

"When it's over there'll be a place for you at the Point," Crook promised.

The General called Hank over from the picket-line.

"Packmaster," he directed, "have your train prepared to march North next Monday. You'll be ready?"

"Yes, General. I'll be ready," Hank said.

"No, he won't neither," interrupted a determined feminine voice.

None of them had noticed the approach of the woman. There was a little gray in her hair, but her cheeks were rosy as apples and her brown eyes snapped. Arms akimbo on buxom hips, she faced Hank.

"Hank Colvin!" she exclaimed. "I didn't come all the way here from New Hampshire jest to have you leave again. Waited for you long enough, I have!"

"Now, Abby," protested Hank, disconcerted for once in his life, "I kept a-tellin' you I'd come home to marry you."

"You kept a-tellin' me that for years, Hank," remarked the lady tartly. "Naow here I be."

Grimacing packers had rallied around from all sides. They cheered the cornered *cargador*.

"We'll all come to the wedding, ma'am," General Crook declared. "I think the chaplain will oblige by tying the knot any time you say."

"No time like the present, sir," spoke up the bride.

The crafty Crook added: "When you're married, I'm going to find quarters for you and your husband at Fort Laramie, up North. You'll be very comfortable there, ma'am, while Hank's off campaigning with me."

"Hank," she said, "naow I know why you writ me so frequent that the General was a right smaht old rapsallion."

The crowd had escorted the happy couple to the chaplain's office. Crook and Fray Luis, promising to follow, still lingered.

Said Crook: "How about that mule of yours, Luis?"

The other whistled. Proverbio came trotting over to his master from the picket-line.

"The decision was not easy," Fray Luis confessed, "but I believe I have made it for the best. General, he must go with you. He must lead the train."

"You are making a real sacrifice, Luis."

"It is better thus. He will serve you well, though"—the *patrón* smiled—"he is not without his faults."

"Master," Proverbio responded, "there is an old Spanish proverb which observes: 'He who looks for a mule without a fault must go on foot.'"

Crook laughed. "But the animal belongs to you, Luis," he objected.

"With your permission I shall turn him over to the Government," Fray Luis said. "I still am convinced that he was an Army mule before he came into my hands. Let him be an Army mule again."

"He's a fine and a faithful animal. I'll watch out for him," the General promised.

"He will serve well," Proverbio's master promised for him. "And when he is old and worn—"

"I'll see that he's pensioned," Crook avowed. "He deserves well of the Republic."

"Your General Sherman once retired an old Army mule which had served since the first battle of Bull Run," Fray Luis said.

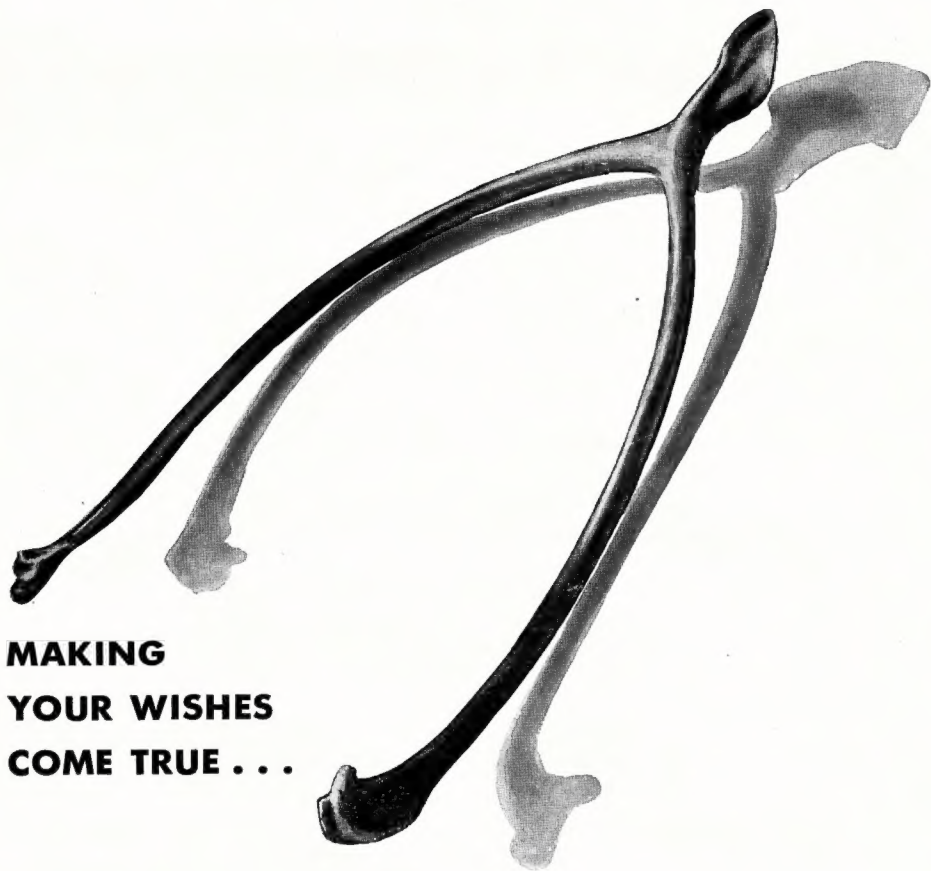
"Right," Crook replied, "and wrote a famous order on it. Can you remember how it went? I'll repeat it when I retire this mule of yours."

Fray Luis put an arm around Proverbio's neck and rubbed him gently under the jaw. He quoted softly:

"He will be turned out, never to be harnessed again, to roll at his own sweet will and to be furnished a full ration till time with him shall be no more."



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